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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 16, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 16, 2005

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday we will now have the singing of O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's international reputation has contributed to the success of various complex environmental accords, such as the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

By hosting the 11th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP11, as well as the first Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto protocol, MOP1, Canada will proudly continue to exert its influence on the world stage.

Delegations from 189 countries will meet in Montreal for what will be known as the Montreal Conference on Climate. Hosting this major conference on climate change is a challenge we are prepared to meet. As the Prime Minister said this morning, "It is in Canada's national interest".

The federal government is demonstrating once again that Montrealers and Quebecers have been well served by the Liberals.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

PAY EQUITY

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a lack of pay equity is still a major problem for women across Canada, but its impacts are felt by all generations and both genders.

Women earn just 71% of what men do for the same job. A woman from a minority group is even worse off. The effects are long lasting. Pension benefits are just 58% of what men get. I have spoken up and demanded better and it is time others did too.

This situation is unacceptable. It has a negative effect on our children, our health and education systems, and our economy. We in the House need to put a stop to this systemic inequality and demand a level playing field for all Canadians. We will all be better off as a result.

* * *

CURLING

Mr. Andy Savoy (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise in the House today to congratulate four young women who curled their way to a Canadian junior championship on Sunday.

I was thrilled to be in the stands cheering on a rink skipped by Andrea Kelly, a native of Aroostook, which is the village next to my hometown of Perth-Andover, as they scored a nine to six victory over Alberta in an exciting final game. The team coached by Paul Green, also from Perth-Andover, includes Kristen MacDiarmid, Jodie DeSolla and Lianne Sobey.

This is the second time in seven years that a rink from my riding has won the Canadian junior women's curling title. In fact the Grand Falls foursome led by Melissa McClure captured both the Canadian and world crowns in 1998. I guess we could say that when it comes to curling, Tobique—Mactaquac rocks.

To Canada's newest rock stars, I wish Andrea and her teammates the same success as the McClure rink when they compete at the world championships in Pinerolo, Italy next month. Again congratulations and all the best to Paul, Andrea and the rest of the team. They are the pride of Perth-Andover, the pride of our province, and soon to be the pride of Canada when they represent our country at the world's.

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[*Translation*]

MAURICE TESSIER

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we learned with sadness of the passing of Mr. Maurice Tessier, who was 91 years old.

S. O. 31

Trained as a lawyer, he was mayor of Rimouski from 1961 to 1969 and president of the UMQ from 1967 to 1968. He was elected to Quebec's National Assembly in 1966 and was made a minister in 1970. The City of Rimouski owes him its status as the region's leading city. This recognition has greatly contributed to Rimouski's development.

Appointed a provincial court judge and president of the Quebec workmen's compensation commission in 1973, Mr. Tessier was, during his time in public office, committed to regional development as president of the Rimouski chamber of commerce, founder and president of the Rimouski Rotary Club, and member of the Cercle universitaire, Club de réforme and the Canadian Red Cross.

On behalf of everyone in the riding and myself, we offer our sincerest condolences to Mr. Tessier's family and friends.

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[English]

THUNDER BAY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Thunder Bay Public Library on the occasion of its 35th anniversary.

The Thunder Bay Public Library is dedicated to providing community access to local and global information resources that support lifelong learning, research and leisure activities. At its four locations across the city, the Thunder Bay Public Library provides residents of all ages and income levels the opportunity to appreciate the works of award winning authors, musicians and filmmakers. Over the years the Thunder Bay Public Library has been recognized with numerous awards for the quality customer service that it provides.

I would ask my fellow parliamentarians to join me in congratulating the Thunder Bay Public Library on its excellence for the past 35 years and to wish it many more years of service to the community.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel said that Bill S-2, an act to amend the Citizenship Act, could allow serious criminals to reacquire Canadian citizenship and return to Canada. This week the Conservative Party has learned that a convicted repeat sexual predator will soon be living again in Canada.

A 33-year-old refugee was convicted of two separate sexual assaults on young girls, the second while on probation for the first. We know that following those sexual attacks he returned to Afghanistan from where he had originally fled. Now he is back and the Liberals have granted him refugee status again on compassionate and humanitarian grounds.

We Conservatives wonder where the Liberal compassion is for these vulnerable young girls who are at risk because this so-called refugee is back in our midst. Where is the sense in allowing him to return from his country of origin to plead for refugee status a second

time? If it was dangerous the first time, why was it not dangerous for him to go back and live there?

Canadians want to know why the Liberals show compassion for a phoney refugee and convicted sexual predator but none for the innocent and vulnerable young girls.

* * *

● (1410)

LEBANON

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of mourners converged on Beirut today for the funeral of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri two days after a car bomb killed him and 16 others.

During his 10 years as prime minister, Rafik Hariri was credited with rebuilding his country after a devastating civil war, and was recognized and applauded internationally, including in Canada, as a moderate politician.

While the search for the perpetrators of this violent act continues, we must ensure that the people of Lebanon are safe and free to choose their parliamentarians in the coming election without any interference or pressure from what Lebanese and international observers call the Syrian occupation.

For these reasons Canada and the international community must insist on the withdrawal of some 15,000 Syrian forces from Lebanon as per UN resolution number 1559. Lebanese sovereignty must be respected and must be protected. For this to happen, the occupying Syrian forces must be withdrawn and their affiliated offices in the country closed.

* * *

[Translation]

RAFIK HARIRI

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today Lebanon is mourning the death of a great man, Rafik Hariri, who is credited with rebuilding the country and who was assassinated in broad daylight in Beirut on Monday, February 14.

The former prime minister had worked tirelessly to put Lebanon back on track after a bloody 15-year civil war. Rafik Hariri led the country from 1992 to 1998 and again from 2000 to 2004. In October he stepped down in opposition to the Syrian interference and to demand the withdrawal of Syrian troops.

The Bloc Québécois offers its deepest sympathy to the Lebanese people and condemns this terrible assassination. The death of the architect of reconstruction must not plunge Lebanon back into instability. Canada, together with the international community, must help the country get back on its feet. Canada must also join the European Union, France and the United States in calling for an international investigation.

S. O. 31

RIDING OF BROME—MISSISQUOI

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was first elected as the member of Parliament for Brome—Missisquoi 10 years ago on February 13, 1995. I want to take this opportunity to thank the constituents of Brome—Missisquoi for continuing to place their trust in me in the four subsequent elections.

I am proud to be their MP and to defend their interests here in Ottawa. I commend their determination, entrepreneurship and their attachment to Liberal values.

I want to assure the people of Brome—Missisquoi of my determination to make the social, economic and natural environment in my riding the focal points of my commitment.

I am extremely honoured to sit with all Members in this House.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals signed on to Kyoto in 1998. For seven years they have dithered. Today the Kyoto protocol officially came into effect and the Liberals have not produced an implementation plan. The dithering continues. There is no plan for Kyoto.

There is no vision for the country. There is no action from the Liberals, only dithering. There is no plan for the promised new deal for cities. No plan for pharmacare. No plan for tax relief. No plan to help our underfunded military. No plan for a foreign policy review. No plan to end the democratic deficit. The Prime Minister dithers.

Four major crown corporations, VIA Rail, the Business Development Bank, the Export Development Bank and Canada Post, are without chief executive officers and are waiting for the Prime Minister to appoint replacements.

There are 16 Senate vacancies, including three from Alberta.

These are decisions to be made by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will not or cannot make a decision. He dithers. Canadians deserve better.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the Kyoto protocol comes into effect. The Government of Canada takes the issue of climate change very seriously and is committed to meeting Canada's Kyoto targets.

As the minister has stated, a strong environment and a strong economy are not mutually exclusive.

There are already major initiatives under way to make our homes and commercial buildings more energy efficient, to reduce emissions from vehicles and industry and to use renewable energy.

As stated in the Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada will be quadrupling the objectives of the wind power production incentive for a total of 4,000 megawatts of wind energy capacity, which is enough electricity for more than a million Canadian homes. At the same time, we are investing in long term

technology solutions in priority areas such as cleaner fossil fuels and the hydrogen economy.

Today marks the beginning of many opportunities for Canadians to both strengthen the environment and increase the economy and the competitiveness of Canadian industry. Today is a day for celebration.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the employment insurance reforms of 1996, fewer workers qualify for the EI program.

Women were the hardest hit by this reform and they are continuing to pay the price. Going from full-time to seasonal employment, women, and particularly single mothers, of whom only 33% are eligible for EI, have found themselves facing poverty.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities tabled a report yesterday on the employment insurance program, containing 20 recommendations.

According to Radio-Canada, the rumour is that the government might change the method of calculating benefits based on the 14 best weeks worked in the previous 12 months, instead of the 12 best weeks, and reduce the number of hours required for new entrants to 750 from 960.

That is contrary to the recommendations of this parliamentary committee, which the Liberal members strongly supported.

The NDP recommends that the Liberal government apply the recommendations made by the committee, which includes Liberals among its members.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sometimes we read the papers for the news and sometimes we read them for the funnies. Today we had both in a *National Post* article about the environment minister's speech last night.

Students, journalists and policy makers across the country watched in horror as the environment minister twisted himself like a pretzel to link Kyoto to foreign aid. The minister suggested that trading hot air credits with Mexico and Brazil would really show Canadian leadership and boost the fortunes of developing nations.

After listening to his speech, we agree with his comment, "We have a lot to improve". But he should start by learning the difference between an emerging market and a developing nation.

Oral Questions

Canadians know what is really going on. The government has no real plan for meeting Kyoto targets and this wacky scheme is just another way for the Liberal government to turn CIDA into a private slush fund.

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[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Christian Simard (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is marking the coming into force of the Kyoto protocol by candidly admitting that there is no pilot on board in environmental matters.

The Minister of the Environment himself acknowledged this lack yesterday, recognizing that Canada, on this historic day, has no plan for its implementation. He warned us that the coming budget not refer to it.

Last fall, the finance minister was sharply criticized by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Johanne G elinas, who said that his department was dragging its feet in using the tax system to protect the environment.

Yesterday, a student unmasked the government and the Minister of the Environment. He said that Canada will host the Montreal conference to give the impression of leadership while distracting attention from its failure to curb greenhouse emissions.

Present and future generations deserve better than this government's false promises.

* * *

[*English*]

OCEAN RANGER

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, in their workplaces and in their churches, Newfoundlanders paused to take note of a tragic anniversary. During the early morning hours of February 15, 1982, the lights of the offshore drilling rig *Ocean Ranger* sank beneath the raging north Atlantic, taking the lives of its crew of 84 men.

The offshore oil industry is by its nature an international industry, but it is also an industry that the people of the province have embraced with hope and determination. It is little wonder, therefore, that 56 of the people lost on the *Ranger* were from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Newfoundlanders are no strangers to the bounty and the danger offered up by the north Atlantic. For centuries, we lived and died by the fishery. Today we are trying to wrestle a future from beneath the ocean floor. Today we remember that our struggle for economic well-being often comes with a heavy price.

Today we salute the families left behind and today we mourn their loss.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the Conservative Party has been caught picking from its orchard of broken promises.

The member for Newmarket—Aurora stated in the House, "On behalf of the Conservative Party I am recommending that we allow Bill C-31 to proceed...". And what happened yesterday? The Conservative Party voted against the motion, playing politics with yet another bill.

It seems that the member for Newmarket—Aurora has taken a page from the political style book of the deputy leader of the Conservative Party. If we cannot trust that party to fulfill its word when it comes to a vote in the House of Commons, how can Canadians expect them to keep any promises at all? It seems that party's word is not worth the napkin it is written on.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

• (1420)

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for eight years the Prime Minister has been saying that the Kyoto accord is one of his top priorities. In fact, less than two years ago, while criticizing his predecessor, the Prime Minister said the following: "I think if you're going to bring in something like Kyoto, you owe it to Canadians to lay the plan in front of them".

Having committed itself to Kyoto, why, after eight years, on the first day of the accord's international implementation, has the government still produced no plan to lay in front of Canadians?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has made it very clear. The Minister of the Environment will be laying down a plan that is full in terms of the objectives that will be set and the means of arriving at them.

I am delighted that the hon. member has raised the issue. I am delighted to announce to this House that the Minister of the Environment and I this morning in Montreal announced that Montreal will be hosting the next major conference on climate change under the auspices of the United Nations.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have not managed to do anything on this one, but we are moving on to the next photo op.

The government has spent or budgeted almost \$4 billion peddling Kyoto to Canadians, but emissions covered by the accord have actually gone up. My question is simple. Could the Prime Minister tell us, if it costs \$4 billion to achieve nothing, how much will it cost to achieve something?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there can be no better indication of the depth of cynicism of the Leader of the Opposition and in fact the Alliance Conservatives than to say on this the day that Kyoto comes into effect that the major conference under the auspices of the United Nations which will lead to the next step in terms of dealing with climate change is nothing but a photo op.

In fact, the ministers and the delegates from over 180 countries will be coming to Montreal. They are coming here for two weeks to deal with the issues, not for a photo op. They are not coming here for that kind of cynicism.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to say for all of the opposition parties that after listening for eight years to unfulfilled promises cynicism is becoming awfully contagious.

Reports persist that the environment minister is going to try to reach the Kyoto targets by using a loophole to buy hot air credits from major polluters. This will cost Canadian taxpayers and businesses billions of dollars and do nothing to clean up the environment.

Would the Prime Minister please assure the House that his scheme to comply with Kyoto is not to buy hot air from other countries?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, it is the slow movers that do not understand how the environment and the economy work together. It is this government that understands—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know that hon. members are trying to help the Minister of the Environment with his answer, but he seems to be doing all right on his own, if we could hear him. Perhaps we could have a little order so members can hear the Minister of the Environment, because there might be another question.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I still hope that we will have a constructive opposition and that we will work, all Canadians together, in order to reach our Kyoto target and do our share for the planet. It is unfortunate that the opposition does not understand that part of the plan, not the main part but part of the plan, must be to use the trading mechanism of the Kyoto protocol.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Kyoto comes into effect and this government has no plan.

When the current public works minister voted against Kyoto, this is what he said: “The job losses from Kyoto ratification will affect all regions of Canada”. Or how about this: “This is a government that could not organize a two car funeral, let alone implement a Kyoto agreement...”.

Will the minister tell Canadians exactly how many jobs will be sacrificed by living up to Kyoto?

•(1425)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder why the opposition thinks Canada will lose jobs. We are becoming one of the leaders for renewable sources of energy. We are becoming one of the leaders of all the sources that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Once again hon. members, I recognize, are trying to assist the minister but I cannot hear a word the minister is saying. The minister has the floor.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, it is a mystery why the opposition does not understand that if Canada becomes a leader for renewable energy and a leader in having cleaner technology with better conservation of energy, we will be more competitive around the world.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously his cabinet colleague thinks he is wrong.

The latest revelation in the Liberal embarrassment called Kyoto is news that the environment minister is planning to send billions of dollars overseas for non-environmental purposes. While Canadians choke on smog, live near waste dumps and dump raw sewage into the ocean, the minister is using Kyoto money for foreign aid.

Why has the minister taken this long to admit that his hot air plan is simply to cover his boost in foreign aid?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, most of the plan will be in Canada. Part of it will be—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know it is Wednesday but we do have to be able to hear the questions and the answers. There is a great deal of unnecessary noise which makes it almost impossible to hear the minister and is resulting in a significant waste of time, so members will miss chances to ask questions and get answers today.

The Minister of the Environment has the floor.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the official opposition does not understand a word about climate change. The sole thing they understand is hot air that they are breathing all the time when someone tries to explain to them how it will work.

Let me tell the House that part of the plan will be to use the trading mechanism to export Canadian technology, to confirm new markets and to decrease greenhouse gas emissions around the world because in global warming the word we need to understand is global.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Kyoto protocol has come into effect but, regrettably, there is no cause for celebration in Canada. Instead of decreasing, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 20% since 1990. The federal voluntary approach has proved to be a failure, and Ottawa still lacks any credible implementation plan to force the hand of the major emitters.

On this historic day, will the Prime Minister admit that his government still has nothing on the credit side of the greenhouse gas emission reduction balance sheet?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois is well aware that not only has the government introduced and implemented a number of initiatives, but more will be forthcoming.

There is, however, one thing I find disappointing: the leader of the Bloc Québécois, who represents a Montreal riding, is not prepared to congratulate the City of Montreal, the Province of Quebec and Canada for hosting the most significant meeting held under the auspices of the United Nations on protecting the environment and managing the impact of climate change.

I do not understand. For once at least, he should be congratulating Montreal, Quebec and Canada.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not understand, but this is not the first time he does not understand, nor will it be the last.

He is talking about Kyoto 2, when he has not even signed Kyoto 1. We know that this Prime Minister, the author of the 1993 red book, promised a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2005, yet the opposite has occurred. Emissions have increased by 20%.

Rather than playing at smoke and mirrors, he ought to be ashamed of turning up at a conference empty handed. I am pleased for Montreal, but it is distressing to see that he has no plan whatsoever. When is he going to present one?

• (1430)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, Canada has had a plan since 2002, a plan that will yield results. For example—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Once again, it is very hard to hear the minister over so much noise. It is vital, when the Chair recognizes an hon. member, for him or her to have the right to give an answer or ask a question.

The Hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: For example, Mr. Speaker, the green plan for municipalities is working very well, but it will not lower emissions immediately. It will be a few years before we see the effect.

One thing is certain, however: this plan needs beefing up. The Government of Canada will be announcing a consolidated plan in the near future. At that time, I will be only too pleased to discuss it with my colleagues, if they are willing to listen.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as an example of inaction, we have the automotive industry. Did the government announce a reasonable plan? No. Its plan for the automotive industry is limited to a voluntary program. The government's approach is to not give any direction. This is pure improvisation. It is magical thinking.

Can the Minister of the Environment deny that his strategy for Kyoto is nothing less than magical thinking, and nothing else?

[English]

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Bloc does not understand the policies that the government has in place when it comes to dealing with the auto industry and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

It is very clear that the auto industry has already honoured 14 previous voluntary agreements. It has already accomplished a 6% reduction in its emissions for the target of 2010, far ahead of its partners down in the United States. The voluntary agreement that we will be putting in place will accomplish the targets by 2010. Canadians will be very proud of that.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since this morning, the Minister of the Environment has been trying hard to lull us with his fancy rhetoric and to have us understand that he is doing everything possible. Still, can he deny that he has no plan or strategy and that he is unable to speak his mind on Kyoto? While he calls himself a talented architect, is he not in reality nothing more than a busy beaver?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, coming from a member from a province where many dams were built and greenhouse gas emissions reduced, that is not a bad comparison.

More seriously, the new plan will soon be released. I am sure it will galvanize Canadians and that, together, we will be able to achieve our objective by working together, ignoring the forces of separation.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister goes to the NDP website he will see his own pollution counter. It was at 1.543 billion tonnes this morning. It goes up by 8 tonnes a second. Every tonne is the difference between where we are and where the Prime Minister promised we would be by this time. It is no wonder he did not want to get up yesterday to defend his record. I would not want to have to defend it either.

The fact remains that we need a plan. We need something that we can judge. After all these years of dithering, when are we going to get a plan?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only has the government set out a very clear set of initiatives, one of which was cited by the minister and is a very successful plan working with the municipalities, but we have also said that in the budget to come a further series of initiatives will be set out.

What is important is the leadership that Canada is taking. This is a global problem and the most important global conference on the issue will take place in Montreal next fall under the leadership of Canada and its Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the future of the planet depends on Canadian leadership, so far it is a doomed planet because nothing of any significance has come from the government. A conference is not a plan. I hope for the Prime Minister's sake that it is not a smog day in Montreal when the conference takes place. We will have hot air on top of smog and still no plan.

After all this dithering, when are we going to have a decent plan?

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that has nothing to do with Kyoto. The New Democratic Party, which wants to get a lot of mileage out of Kyoto, has no fiscal plan to finance its policy. Between these extremes, there is the Liberal Government of Canada, which will enable Canadians to achieve the Kyoto objective while keeping finances sound.

* * *

HYDROELECTRIC DAMS

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, anyone at all can get into a power plant. From Kitimat to Churchill Falls, hundreds of major dams are exposed to the al-Qaeda and Hezbollah of the world.

Unaware, even yesterday of the Radio-Canada revelations, the minister is getting lost in her explanations. North America's energy is threatened, and she is asleep at the switch.

What role will she give CSIS in this matter, this very day?

[*English*]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in reference to the specific commentary around Hydro-Québec, this is a matter first and foremost for Hydro-Québec and then for the province. That is why Premier Charest and Minister Chagnon this morning asked the Sûreté du Québec to investigate the situation as it relates to Hydro-Québec.

Most of the critical infrastructure in this country is owned by the private sector. We work with the private sector, local governments and provinces. We are in the process of developing a critical infrastructure protection plan.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over two years ago there was a blackout that left much of Ontario and all of the PMO in the dark. Apparently the Deputy Prime Minister is still in the dark.

What I asked her yesterday about the protection of a dam in Quebec, she did not have a clue. Last night Radio-Canada revealed how easy it would be for a terrorist to cripple the energy supply.

RDI reporters were able to walk directly into two centrally controlled major dams that are power supports for all of North America. It has been four years since 9/11 and we do not have a critical infrastructure plan nor do we have an updated Emergency Preparedness Act.

Why has the government not acted to protect—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it very strange that a party that is usually in the business of respecting things like provincial jurisdiction would suggest, as it relates to most of the critical infrastructure in the country which is owned by the private sector and regulated by provinces, that

Oral Questions

somehow we should simply step in, push them aside and tell them that we will protect their critical infrastructure.

Premier Charest and Minister Chagnon did the right thing this morning when they called upon the Sûreté in the province of Quebec to work with Hydro-Québec around the issues that were raised yesterday and we will—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberals voted against allowing parents to choose different child care options and voted against—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove has the floor. I am sure she appreciates the assistance with her question but she has the floor and we will all want to hear her question, especially the minister to whom it is directed.

Ms. Rona Ambrose:—tax measures that support those child care options.

Let us be clear. The Liberal plan does not even scratch the surface to address the child care crisis in the country and it does not address the needs and desires of parents for choice in child care.

Will the Minister of Social Development explain why the Liberal plan only offers one option?

• (1440)

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about choice.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Social Development has the floor.

Hon. Ken Dryden: I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that she look at her own party's platform, the \$2,000 child tax deduction in the last election—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The minister has the floor. Obviously his answer is a popular one.

Hon. Ken Dryden:—for child care, how it means almost nothing for parents and putting money in parents' pockets—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove has a supplementary.

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the proposed Liberal child care system is not about children. It is about politics. This is a ludicrous approach to raising and educating children. Young Canadian families deserve more, and Canadians need to know that the Liberals have not and will not entertain choices for how they may want to care for their children.

Oral Questions

Will the Minister of Social Development admit his plan never once entertained choices for child care?

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I was trying to say before, that party's platform in the last election for child care means almost nothing in the pockets of parents for child care. It brings Canadians no closer to affordable child care. It is completely contrary to building quality. I ask the member and the party opposite to be honest, do the math, think and see where they end up.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with the coming into force of the Kyoto protocol today, it is now imperative the federal government take concrete measures, and promoting public transit is one of them. In fact, the Minister of Transport said publicly that he is open to the idea of making the cost of public transit passes deductible for income tax purposes.

With the next federal budget just days away, what initiatives has the Minister of Transport taken in this respect, and has he finally managed to convince his colleague, the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the initiatives of this government that will be included in the budget will, of course, be the transfer of the gasoline tax to help municipalities, and particularly larger cities, set up adequate public transit services. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars that will help build and put in place public transit infrastructures. This is the best news that large cities will have heard in a long time.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport talks a good line and is a master at diversion. However, as far as concrete measures are concerned, we are still waiting.

So, should the Minister of Finance oppose this idea, will the Minister of Transport introduce in the House a bill similar to the one I tabled, providing for a tax deduction for public transit costs incurred, something which, according to the minister himself, would help increase significantly the use of public transit?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing more concrete than actual transfers to Canadian municipalities and cities. With these transfers, they will be able to modernize their public transit services and put money where it is needed to ensure that environmental objectives are achieved. Public transit is indeed a priority and there will money for it in the budget. Do not give it a thought, kindly rejoice.

• (1445)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the coming into force of the Kyoto protocol will be the opportunity to launch a great offensive to improve everyone's lives. Moreover, it will also be an important economic lever, if the government takes appropriate action.

Is the Minister of Industry prepared to develop a public transit component within the Technology Partnerships Canada program,

which would enable the industry to reach the Kyoto targets as quickly as possible?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is something that we will be looking at as part of the overall plan going forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Industry intervene to provide massive support to the public transit industry, for example Bombardier Transportation and Nova Bus, thus enabling the renewal of transportation infrastructures and creating thousands of jobs? Will there finally be an optimistic message for people who want a better environment?

[English]

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are moving ahead very rapidly with an aerospace strategy for Canada. We will continue to push aggressively on that in the months ahead.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Social Development made a shocking statement. He said that parents only said they wanted to stay at home with their children because they felt guilty about having others care for their kids.

Will the minister apologize and admit his child care scheme does not include stay-at-home options for parents?

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting approach. They make up quotes. They attribute quotes to whomever they want, and then they attack the quotes and they attack the person. That is quite a strategy. However, it is not honest and it is not a game I will play.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal child care plan would only increase the number of regulated subsidized child care spaces from 7% to 10%. A program that only helps one in ten children, only helps some parents and only some provinces is not a national program.

When will this minister admit his plan will not meet the needs of shift workers, part time parents and rural parents?

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has made a commitment of \$5 billion over five years for an early learning and child care system. That represents a 40% increase in the amount of money that will be spent on early learning and child care in the country. That 40% is something that is unprecedented. In fact, if the government had not made that commitment, we would be nowhere in child care for many years to come.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, and he thought the NHL was rough.

Yesterday the Auditor General ripped the government for the lack of accountability around foundations. It was this Prime Minister ironically who set up these foundations to be unaccountable, the same person who never misses a chance to talk about how outraged he is about the lack of accountability around sponsorship.

It is not true that the Prime Minister set up these foundations precisely so the public would not have a clue what was happening with their money?

• (1450)

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly not true. If the member would like, I will quote what the Auditor General of Canada said this morning on CBC Radio. She said:

We don't have any issues with the people who are there and I wouldn't want any of our comments to be taken as a criticism of those people nor of the activities that are going on in the foundations.

On the issue of accountability, as a result of legislation presented in the House by the current Prime Minister when he was finance minister, foundations are required under the funding agreements to provide information to the public. Plans are provided annually to the responsible minister and Parliament.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how could the Auditor General criticize anyone in the foundations when she is not allowed to audit their books? We know that not a day goes by when the Prime Minister is not mad as hell about sponsorship, and he always wants to get to the bottom of it, come hell or high water. Now he has a chance to channel that chronic anger into something positive.

For the foundations he set up to be unaccountable, he now has a chance to go in and do something good. Will he commit to allowing Parliament and the Auditor General to go in there and scrutinize those foundations?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the member has been for the last number of years because the foundations have willingly come before Parliament many times.

In the agreement that they were given by the government, their requirements were independent evaluations which must be presented to the responsible minister and made public, provisions that allow the responsible minister to carry out special independent program evaluations and audits of compliance.

The tools the Auditor General is looking for are all there. Parliament has them and may want to use them.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister in his response has demonstrated his confidence on

Oral Questions

behalf of all Canadians that Canada can and will play its part in building a better environmental and economic future.

To this end, COP 11 will be the next international meeting in Montreal, where the global course on climate change beyond Kyoto will be set.

Would the Minister of the Environment please inform his colleagues on all sides of the House what opportunities lie ahead for Canadians in advancing the climate change agenda?

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, delegations from 189 countries will gather in Montreal for the Montreal Conference on Climate, as it will be known. Up to 10,000 people are expected to attend.

[English]

When humanity emerges from the 21st century, it will need to have gained control of its impact on the planet. The Montreal climate conference will be turning point. It must enable us to create, on a sound footing, an international system that will apply to 2012.

[Translation]

The Government of Canada will work with all the countries in the world to make this major conference a resounding success for the planet.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier the parliamentary secretary commented that this was a day to celebrate, as the Kyoto accord comes into practice. Clearly, this is a humiliation for Canada in our lack of leadership on this issue. We have no plan and we have no leadership whatsoever on climate change.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources commit today to offering confirmation that he will not lift the moratorium on offshore oil and gas drilling off the Queen Charlotte Islands?

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have had over two years of consultation with the people in British Columbia. We have clearly put a process in place. More work needs to be done. We will have full consultation with the government, with the industry stakeholders and with the science review for further review on the impact of all offshore drilling. Only then, when everything is complete, will we make a decision.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the minister's idea of consultation is continuing to ask the people of British Columbia until he gets the answer that he wants. Seventy-five per cent of British Columbians said no and 100% of the first nations said no to lifting the moratorium.

The minister seems so committed to jumping into bed with Gordon Campbell over this pipe dream of a project, he cannot hear the people of British Columbia. I ask him again to agree with the people of British Columbia and with the first nations to keep the moratorium on offshore oil and gas drilling in the Hecate Strait?

Oral Questions

●(1455)

Hon. R. John Efford (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I am satisfied that due diligence is done from every possible aspect and that a complete science review is done, only then will a decision be made.

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AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Ted Menzies (MacLeod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the CIDA budget tops \$2 billion annually, but the Liberal government continues to treat taxpayers with disrespect and arrogance.

The Auditor General shocked Canadians yesterday when she revealed that Canada's foreign aid budget is being squandered on goods never received and services never rendered.

Is this a case of simple incompetence or is it another sponsorship scandal in the making?

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try not to judge the confidence of that question, but I think what is key here is that the Auditor General said, "Overall, CIDA has made satisfactory progress" in responding to her recommendations.

It is important to note that it is often confusing because the Auditor General makes reference to grants and contributions. She made reference to the fact we are increasing grants. There was, after 20 years, a change in Treasury Board. It now allows grants.

The organizations to which I give grants are the World Food Program and the World Health Organization. I am very comfortable with their auditing processes.

Mr. Ted Menzies (MacLeod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has taken CIDA to task for financial mismanagement yet again. This time she reprimanded the minister for a 25-fold increase in money funnelled through grants that are not audited or accountable. Even worse, seven out of eight audited cases show that CIDA pays out money before work is done, cutting lump sum cheques without proper authorization.

What is the minister hiding, or does she not know what is going on in her department?

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know it is a subtle challenge. It is one we call flexible response. When the first question has been answered and the second is a repeat, the member should try to connect with the answer he has received.

The Auditor General made it very clear, my dear sir, that there has been a change—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I cannot hear the minister and she is not 10 feet away. There is far too much noise. I cannot hear because there is so much yelling. Perhaps the minister could continue her answer in silence.

Hon. Aileen Carroll: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to explain, although it is a challenge.

We have here a difference between contributions and grants. Treasury Board made a change which we found to be very good. The Auditor General is pleased with the change. The change allows us to give grants. I have a problem and I ask that the hon. member—

The Speaker: I am afraid we have run out of time.

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AIRPORTS

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the Auditor General, the Liberal's much promised airport rent review due in the fall of 2002 is still not ready. Meanwhile, her report shows the government's airport taxes are projected to rise from \$332 million to nearly \$1.3 billion in the coming years. So much for the promised freeze. Taxpayers are being ripped off, once to build the airport, and then again to pay for these rents.

When are the Liberals going to stop ripping off Canadian airports and Canadian travellers?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member also read the report. It is congratulating the Department of Transport for its transparency and the way it is administering the leases.

As a matter of fact, the review is now complete. It has been shared with some of my colleagues, especially the Minister of Finance. I hope that in the next few days we will have some good news.

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[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have learned from the Auditor General that, since Jean Pelletier, nothing has changed under the Liberals. All appointments to crown corporations remain the Prime Minister's exclusive domain. For Ms. Fraser, favouritism, incompetence and inexperience are the trademarks of this administration. Governance is the last of our castaways' concerns.

Canadian families deserve good governance, but how can the Minister of Finance reduce taxes in this lackadaisical climate?

●(1500)

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member would take the time to read the Auditor General's report, he would find that she said exactly the opposite of that. She noted improvements in the appointments and qualifications of people appointed to boards.

However, tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock I will be tabling the report, and he can review the actions that we are attempting to take and judge for himself.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government wants to set up a foundation into which it can transfer funds for the child care program. Is this not a great way to pass the buck? This decision is all the more surprising given that the Auditor General has condemned the lack of transparency associated with the administration of foundations.

The Minister of Social Development should be extremely clear and should make a commitment that it is out of the question for child care funds to go to the same kind of foundation as the Auditor General has condemned.

Is he able to make this commitment right now?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has made no such decision. I think the member is maybe presuming upon a budget decision, but she should wait until the budget is brought down.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has criticized the foundations that manage public funds without any sort of democratic controls. I remind the Minister of Social Development of the Prime Minister's promise that Quebec would get its share of the child care funding with no strings attached.

How does he intend to honour this promise and immediately transfer these funds to Quebec, in the next budget?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can the Bloc, particularly the hon. member for Québec, talk out of both sides of its mouth at once?

On the one hand, the hon. member is asking for the unconditional transfer of funds to Quebec and, on the other, she is opposed to the foundation that might allow such an unconditional transfer to Quebec.

Such inconsistency. Such confusion. Such typical behaviour from the Bloc.

* * *

[English]

TERRORISM

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, providing testimony before the Senate security committee, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness blamed two of her ministerial colleagues for the Liberal government's refusal to put the Tamil Tigers on the list of known terrorist entities.

Does the minister believe that the Tamil Tigers should be on the terrorist list, and if she does, has she advised cabinet to put them on the list on the advice of CSIS?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

what an absolutely ridiculous preface to this question. I did not blame my colleagues. I was trying to explain the process that the Minister of Foreign Affairs himself had described and talked about in the pages of the paper some days before.

In relation to the listing process, as I have made absolutely plain, the list is not static. We continue to review this list. I will continue to review it and as circumstances change and require, I will act.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the good people in Canada's Tamil community, our own intelligence services and others have asked the government repeatedly to ban the Tamil Tigers. Apparently the Minister of Foreign Affairs has received a phone call from Condoleezza Rice or one of her officials, who apparently said, "Hey minister, we have banned that gang of thugs down here. Why do you not just let them run around Canada?"

Will the minister please clarify who exactly talked to him from the U.S. State Department, and why would he say yes to Americans but no to Canadians?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Canadian foreign policy is being made here in Canada and this decision has been made by our government. However, we do consult with our allies. When we talked about Sri Lanka, we consulted with Norway which has been playing an outstanding role in the peace process. We have consulted with the United States who are also interested.

Since the February 2002 ceasefire, no country has taken any action against the Tamil Tigers. We believe that at this time, given the situation, it should be in that direction.

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PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Health about Internet pharmacies.

It is now reported that two Internet pharmacies are being sued for selling counterfeit drugs from India to customers in the United States while pretending that they are selling Canadian products.

What does the Minister of Health intend to do to address this threat of irresponsible Internet pharmacies, which in addition to their usual faults are now threatening the excellent reputation of Canada's pharmaceutical industry?

● (1505)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question of unethical practices is at the heart of what we are trying to address. We must ensure that there are good ethical practices that produce good medicine.

The Internet pharmacy association is providing evidence before the Standing Committee on Health. I am hoping it can shed light on the unethical conduct that it engages in and participates in.

*Routine Proceedings***PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Mildred A. Dover, Prince Edward Island Minister of Education; the Honourable Madeleine Dubé, New Brunswick Minister of Education; the Honourable Tom Hedderson, Newfoundland Minister of Education; and the Honourable Jamie Muir, Nova Scotia Minister of Education.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

The Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 81(14), to inform the House that the motion to be considered tomorrow during the consideration of the Business of Supply is as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should recognize the public health impacts of smog and the failure of voluntary emission standards by legislating mandatory improvements to vehicle efficiency in all classes of light duty vehicles sold in Canada.

[Translation]

This motion, standing in the name of the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, is votable. Copies of the motion are available at the Table.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a number of order in council appointments recently made by the government.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**HEALTH**

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Health.

The committee has considered proposed regulations amending the tobacco reporting regulations and unanimously has recommended that the government enact the proposed regulations as amended.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 the committee requests that the government table a response to this report.

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[Translation]

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth

report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on Bill C-23, an act to establish the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development and to amend and repeal certain related acts.

With your permission, I would like to thank the members of the committee for their cooperation in reviewing this very technical aspect of the legislation in such a short time. It heartens me to be working together with my hon. colleagues from the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party.

[English]

It goes to show that when partisanship is put aside much can be accomplished to ensure that Canadians are given the highest quality of service.

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Finance on Bill C-39, an act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act and to enact an act respecting the provision of funding for diagnostic and medical equipment.

On Tuesday, February 15, 2005, the committee agreed to report it with amendments.

* * *

●(1510)

[English]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-335, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (oath or solemn affirmation).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a private member's bill to change the oath of office of members of the House of Commons.

I was shocked, when I took my oath and joined this illustrious group, that it did not mention the word "Canada" at all. Therefore, I am adding to the oath that "I will be loyal to Canada and will perform the duties of a member of the House of Commons honestly and justly".

I feel it is a way of making a commitment to this great country of ours as a member of Parliament.

Routine Proceedings

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the petitioners from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke recognize that the best foundation for society, families and the raising of children is the lifelong union between one man and one woman. They are asking that Parliament define marriage in federal law as being the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition originating from the very excellent riding of Kingston and the Islands.

Queen's University students, Ian Griffiths and a number of others, put a tremendous amount of time, I am told, into assembling 2,000 names of students who support the government's legislation concerning equal marriage.

I am pleased to table this petition on behalf of the good citizens of Kingston and the Islands, so well represented in this Parliament.

FISHERIES

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today from citizens concerned about the disappearance of 1.5 million sockeye from the Fraser River last summer. They are concerned that the ongoing inquiry which the government has commissioned is unable to get to the bottom of the problem.

The fisheries committee was on the west coast and conducted its hearings. The new committee the government has formed will not be able to get to the root of the problem because it cannot subpoena witnesses and will not take testimony under oath, which the petitioners would like to see.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present two petitions on behalf of the Canada Family Action Coalition.

The petitioners request that Parliament use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including invoking section 33 of the charter if necessary, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

The second petition reads the same way, that Parliament use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including invoking section 33 of the charter if necessary, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I would like to present a petition today from people concerned about the plans to begin taxation of post-secondary funding for first nations people. We know how difficult it is for so many first nations students to get post-secondary

education. The petitioners are very concerned about the efforts to tax them.

● (1515)

HOUSING

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions in the House today.

The first one is signed by residents of Downtown Eastside in Vancouver who are very concerned about the rise of homelessness in the city of Vancouver. They call for a major investment in delivering social housing to meet the needs of the city of Vancouver and to reinvest in CMHC's surplus funds into social housing.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the second petition the petitioners call on Russia and the U.S.A. to end their launch on warning posture and to take all their strategic nuclear armed missiles off hair trigger alert status. The petitioners calls on Parliament to take action to make sure that happens.

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present to the House of Commons this afternoon.

The first is from residents in my riding of Prince George—Peace River, specifically from the city of Fort St. John and the surrounding areas, including Charlie Lake, a small community outside Fort St. John.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to recognize that child pornography is condemned by the clear majority of Canadians, that Liberal Bill C-20 does not adequately protect our nation's children, and that the Liberal government has not prevented artistic merit from being used as a defence for the production and possession of child pornography. Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all materials that promote or glorify child pornography are outlawed.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is concerning, as so many are, the very historic debate that is about to get under way concerning the redefinition of marriage. The petitioners are from Fort St. John, Charlie Lake and Chetwynd, communities in my riding.

The petitioners wish to note that marriage is the best foundation for families and for the raising of children. The House passed a motion in June 1999 that called for marriage to continue to be recognized as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. Marriage is the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament. Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to pass legislation to recognize the institution of marriage in federal law as being a lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Government Orders

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition from Langley residents. The petitioners state that the majority of Canadians support the current definition of marriage and they are calling on Parliament to provide legislation to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman.

AUTISM

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a second petition from the Langley-Surrey area. The petitioners are asking Parliament to include autism as a required treatment and to create academic chairs at universities in each province to provide training for autism.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from a large number of women in my riding.

The petitioners point to promises which were made 15 years ago following the tragic events at École Polytechnique in Montreal. They point out that more must be done to end violence against women. For example, women among many others should have a place they call home, affordable housing. They should have a chance to learn, a full opportunity throughout their lives to education. They should have a chance to care for their children. Things such as a living wage for women; safety for women with disabilities; a safe place to work, free from harassment, abuse and violence need to be considered. Women should feel safe in Canada. Policy reforms are needed to protect domestic workers; to abolish the head tax; and to include gender and sexual orientation as grounds for claiming refugee status. Women around the world should feel safe.

[Translation]

SENTIER PÉNINSULE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more than 200 people from my region, the Acadian peninsula, have signed a petition in support of the Sentier Péninsule bicycle path project. This path is part of the NB Trail and needs to be maintained for the benefit of future generations.

Therefore, these petitioners call on Parliament to provide funding to revitalize this project in the Acadian peninsula.

[English]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the honour of presenting a petition on behalf of the good people of the Caronport Community Church who reside in my riding of Palliser.

The petitioners wish to call to the attention of Parliament that marriage, defined as the lifelong union between one man and one woman, is the best foundation for families and the raising of children. This definition of marriage has been changed by the courts, but it is in the exclusive jurisdiction of Parliament to define marriage.

These constituents petition that Parliament define marriage in federal law as being a lifelong union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

• (1520)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to present two petitions on behalf of my constituents.

My constituents feel that it is wrong that the courts have been involved in defining marriage. They believe that is a responsibility correctly left to the elected people in the House of Commons. Further, they believe it is the responsibility of the members of this House of Commons to uphold the current definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, who would like to draw to the attention of the House that the majority of Canadians believe that the laws of Canada should be determined by Parliament, not by our courts.

The petitioners state that it is the duty of Parliament to ensure that marriage is defined in the manner in which Canadians wish. Therefore, they call upon Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including the invocation of the notwithstanding clause, section 33 of the charter, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as being the legal union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

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[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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MOTION FOR PAPERS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CIVIL MARRIAGE ACT

Right Hon. Paul Martin (for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada) moved that Bill C-38, an act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Bill C-38, the civil marriage act. I rise in support of a Canada in which liberties are safeguarded, rights are protected and the people of this land are treated as equals under the law.

*Government Orders**[English]*

This is an important day. The attention of our nation is focused on this chamber in which John Diefenbaker introduced the Bill of Rights, and in which Pierre Trudeau fought to establish the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Our deliberations will not be merely about a piece of legislation or sections of legal text. More deeply they will be about the kind of nation we are today and the nation we want to be.

This bill protects minority rights. This bill affirms the charter guarantee of religious freedom. It is that straightforward and it is that important.

That is why I stand before members here today and before the people of our country to say that I believe in and I will fight for the Charter of Rights. I believe in and I will fight for a Canada that respects the foresight and the vision of those who created and entrenched the charter. I believe in and I will fight for a future in which generations of Canadians to come, Canadians born here and abroad, have the opportunity to value the charter as we do today, as an essential pillar of our democratic freedom.

There have been a number of arguments put forward by those who do not support this bill. It is important and it is respectful to examine them and to assess them. Let me do so now.

• (1525)

[Translation]

First, some have claimed that, once this bill becomes law, religious freedoms will be less than fully protected. This is demonstrably untrue. As it pertains to marriage, the government's legislation affirms the charter guarantee: that religious officials are free to perform such ceremonies in accordance with the beliefs of their faith.

In this, we are guided by the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada, which makes clear that in no church, no synagogue, no mosque, no temple—in no religious house will those who disagree with same sex unions be compelled to perform them. Period. That is why this legislation is about civil marriage, not religious marriage.

[English]

Moreover, and this is crucially important, the Supreme Court has declared unanimously:

—the guarantee of religious freedom in section 2(a) of the Charter is broad enough to protect religious officials from being compelled by the state to perform civil or religious same-sex marriages that are contrary to their religious beliefs.

The facts are plain. Religious leaders who preside over marriage ceremonies must and will be guided by what they believe. If they do not wish to celebrate marriages for same sex couples, that is their right. The Supreme Court says so and the charter says so.

[Translation]

One final observation on this aspect of the issue: Religious leaders have strong views both for and against this legislation. They should express them. Certainly, many of us in this House, myself included, have a strong faith, and we value that faith and its influence on the decisions we make.

But all of us have been elected to serve here as parliamentarians. And, as public legislators, we are responsible for serving all Canadians and protecting the rights of all Canadians.

We will be influenced by our faith but we also have an obligation to take the widest perspective—to recognize that one of the great strengths of Canada is its respect for the rights of each and every individual, to understand that we must not shrink from the need to reaffirm the rights and responsibilities of Canadians in an evolving society.

[English]

The second argument ventured by opponents of the bill is that government ought to hold a national referendum on this issue. I reject this, not out of a disregard for the view of the people, but because it offends the very purpose of the charter.

The charter was enshrined to ensure that the rights of minorities are not subjected—are never subjected—to the will of the majority. The rights of Canadians who belong to a minority group must always be protected by virtue of their status as citizens, regardless of their numbers, and these rights must never be left vulnerable to the impulses of the majority.

We embrace freedom and equality in theory. We must also embrace them in fact.

• (1530)

[Translation]

Third, some have counseled the government to extend to gays and lesbians the right to “civil union”. This would give same sex couples many of the rights of a wedded couple, but their relationships would not legally be considered marriage. In other words, they would be equal, but not quite as equal as the rest of Canadians.

The courts have clearly and consistently ruled that this option would offend the equality provisions of the charter. For instance, the British Columbia Court of Appeal stated that, “Marriage is the only road to true equality for same sex couples. Any other form of recognition of same sex relationships... falls short of true equality”.

[English]

Put simply, we must always remember that “separate but equal” is not equal. What is more, those who call for the establishment of civil unions fail to understand that the Government of Canada does not have the constitutional jurisdiction to do so. Only the provinces have that. Only the provinces could define such a regime, and they could define it in 10 different ways, and some jurisdictions might not bother to define it at all. There would be uncertainty. There would be confusion. There would certainly not be equality.

Fourth, some are urging the government to respond to the decisions of the courts by getting out of the marriage business altogether. That would mean no more civil weddings for any couples.

Government Orders

It is worth noting that this idea was rejected by the major religions themselves when their representatives appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in 2003. Moreover, it would seem to be an extreme and counterproductive response for the government to deny civil marriage to opposite sex couples simply so that it can keep it from same sex couples. To do so would simply be to replace one form of discrimination with another.

[*Translation*]

Finally, there are some who oppose this legislation who would have the government use the notwithstanding clause in the Charter of Rights to override the courts and reinstate the traditional definition of marriage. And really, this is the fundamental issue here.

Understand that in seven provinces and one territory, the lawful union of two people of the same sex in civil marriage is already the law of the land. The debate here today is not about whether to change the definition of marriage—it has been changed. The debate comes down to whether we should override a right that is now in place. The debate comes down to the charter, the protection of minority rights, and whether the federal government should invoke the notwithstanding clause.

I know that some think we should use the clause. For example, some religious leaders feel this way. I respect their candour in publicly recognizing that because same sex marriage is already legal in most of the country, the only way—the only way—to again make civil marriage the exclusive domain of opposite sex couples is to use the notwithstanding clause.

[*English*]

Ultimately, there is only one issue before the House in this debate. For most Canadians, in most parts of our country, same sex marriage is already the law of the land. Thus, the issue is not whether rights are to be granted. The issue is whether rights that have been granted are to be taken away.

Some are frank and straightforward and say yes. Others have not been so candid. Despite being confused—

An hon. member: Who's confused?

Right Hon. Paul Martin: You are.

Despite being confronted with clear facts, despite being confronted with the unanimous opinion of 134 legal scholars, experts in their field, intimately familiar with the Constitution, some have chosen to not be forthright with Canadians. They have eschewed the honest approach in favour of the political approach. They have attempted to cajole the public into believing that we can return to the past with a simple snap of the fingers, that we can revert to the traditional definition of marriage without consequence and without overriding the charter. They are insincere. They are disingenuous. And they are wrong.

There is one question that demands an answer, a straight answer, from those who would seek to lead this nation and its people. It is a simple question. Will the notwithstanding clause be used to overturn the definition of civil marriage and deny Canadians a right that is guaranteed under the charter?

This question does not demand rhetoric. It demands clarity. There are only two legitimate answers: yes or no. Not the demagoguery we have heard, not the dodging, not the flawed reasoning, not the false options, but simply yes or no. Will we take away a right that is guaranteed under the charter? I, for one, will answer that question and I will answer it clearly. I will say no.

● (1535)

[*Translation*]

The notwithstanding clause is part of the Charter of Rights. But there is a reason that no prime minister has ever used it. For a prime minister to use the powers of his office to explicitly deny rather than affirm a right enshrined under the charter would serve as a signal to all minorities that no longer can they look to the nation's leader and to the nation's Constitution for protection, for security, for the guarantee of their freedoms.

We would risk becoming a country in which the defence of rights is weighed, calculated and debated based on electoral or other considerations. That would set us back decades as a nation. It would be wrong for the minorities of this country. It would be wrong for Canada.

[*English*]

The charter is the living document. It is the heartbeat of our Constitution.

It is also a proclamation. It declares that as Canadians we live under a progressive and inclusive set of fundamental beliefs about the value of the individual. It declares that we are all lessened when any one of us is denied a fundamental right.

We cannot exalt the charter as a fundamental aspect of our national character and then use the notwithstanding clause to reject the protections that it would extend. Our rights must be eternal, not subject to political whim.

For those who value the charter yet oppose the protection of rights for same sex couples, I ask them: if the Prime Minister and a national government are willing to take away the rights of one group, what is there to say that they will stop at that? If the charter is not there today to protect the rights of one minority, then how can we as a nation of minorities ever hope, ever believe and ever trust that it will be there to protect us tomorrow?

My responsibility as Prime Minister, my duty to Canada and to Canadians, is to defend the charter in its entirety, not to pick and choose the rights that our laws will protect and those that are to be ignored, not to declare those who shall be equal and those who shall not be equal. My duty is to protect the charter as some in this House will not.

Let us never forget that one of the reasons Canada is such a vibrant nation, so diverse, so rich in the many cultures and races of the world, is that immigrants who come here, as was the case with the ancestors of many of us in this chamber, feel free and are free to practice their religion, to follow their faith and to live as they want to live. No homogeneous system of beliefs is imposed on them.

Government Orders

When we as a nation protect minority rights, we are protecting our multicultural nature. We are reinforcing the Canada we cherish. We are saying proudly and unflinchingly that defending rights, not just those that happen to apply to us, not just those that everyone else approves of, but all fundamental rights, is at the very soul of what it means to be a Canadian. This is a vital aspect of the values we hold dear and strive to pass on to others in the world who are embattled, who endure tyranny, whose freedoms are curtailed and whose rights are violated.

Why is the charter so important? We have only to look at our own history. Unfortunately, Canada's story is one in which not everyone's rights were protected under the law. We have not been free from discrimination. We have not been free from bias or unfairness. There have been blatant inequalities. Remember that it was once thought perfectly acceptable to deny women personhood and the right to vote. There was a time not so long ago when if one wore a turban one could not serve in the RCMP. The examples are many, but what is important now is that they are part of our past, not our present.

Over time, perspectives changed. We evolved and we grew and our laws evolved and grew with us. That is as it should be. Our laws must reflect equality, not as we understood it a century or even a decade ago, but as we understand it today.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

For gays and lesbians, evolving social attitudes have, over the years, prompted a number of important changes in the law. Recall that, until the late 1960s, the state believed it had the right to peek into our bedrooms. Until 1977, homosexuality was still sufficient grounds for deportation. Until 1992, gay people were prohibited from serving in the military. In many parts of the country, gays and lesbians could not designate their partners as beneficiaries under employee medical and dental benefits, insurance policies or private pensions. Until very recently, people were being fired merely for being gay.

Today, we rightly see discrimination based on sexual orientation as arbitrary, inappropriate and unfair. Looking back, we can hardly believe that such rights were ever a matter for debate. It is my hope that we will ultimately see the current debate in a similar light; realizing that nothing has been lost or sacrificed by the majority in extending full rights to the minority.

Without our relentless, inviolable commitment to equality and minority rights, Canada would not be at the forefront in accepting newcomers from all over the world, in making a virtue of our multicultural nature—the complexity of ethnicities and beliefs that make up Canada, that make us proud that we are where our world is going, not where it's been.

[*English*]

Four years ago I stood in the House and voted to support the traditional definition of marriage. Many of us did. My misgivings about extending the right of civil marriage to same sex couples were a function of my faith and my perspective on the world around us, but much has changed since that day.

We have heard from courts across the country, including the Supreme Court. We have come to the realization that instituting civil

unions, adopting a separate but equal approach would violate the equality provisions of the charter. We have confirmed that extending the right of civil marriage to gays and lesbians will not in any way infringe on religious freedoms.

Where does that leave us? I believe it leaves us staring in the face of the Charter of Rights with but a single decision to make. Do we abide by the Charter of Rights and protect minority rights or do we not?

I urge those who would oppose the bill to consider that the core of the issue before us today is whether the rights of all Canadians are to be respected. I believe they must be: justice demands it, fairness demands it and the Canada we love demands it.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

In the 1960s, the government of Lester Pearson faced opposition as it moved to entrench official bilingualism. But it persevered, and it won the day. Its members believed it was the right thing to do, and it was. In the 1980s, the government of Pierre Trudeau faced opposition as it attempted to repatriate the Constitution and enshrine a Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But it persevered, and it won the day. Its members believed it was the right thing to do, and it was.

[*English*]

There are times when we as parliamentarians can feel the gaze of history upon us. They felt in the days of Pearson and they felt in the days of Trudeau. We, the 308 men and women elected to represent one of the most inclusive, just and respectful countries on the face of this earth, feel it today.

There are few nations whose citizens cannot look to Canada and see their own reflection. For generations, men, women and families from the four corners of the globe have made the decision to choose Canada as their home. Many have come here seeking freedom of thought, religion and belief, seeking the freedom simply to be.

The people of Canada have worked hard to build a country that opens its doors to include all, regardless of their differences; a country that respects all, regardless of their differences; and a country that demands equality for all, regardless of their differences.

If we do not step forward, then we will step back. If we do not protect a right, then we deny it. Together as a nation, together as Canadians, let us step forward.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order. It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, Health; the hon. member for Vancouver Island North, Sable Island; the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, Agriculture.

[English]

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I turn to my formal remarks I would like to begin with just a brief reply to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister spoke at length, as we just heard, about rights in the Charter of Rights. I remind the Prime Minister that in our system of government, the Prime Minister does not decide or define our rights. The Prime Minister does not interpret the Charter of Rights. The Supreme Court of Canada does that. He asked the Supreme Court of Canada to endorse his interpretation and it just refused.

I also want to express today my disappointment in a sense that we are having such a debate. As we all remember, the expectations for the Prime Minister during the leadership race were very high. I will refer to that leadership race in a few moments.

What do we have today? We have no agreement on child care. We have a phantom deal on infrastructure. We have missing policy reviews on defence and foreign affairs. We have none of that famous fixed for a generation in health care. We have holes in federal agencies, the same old democratic deficit in the Senate, unaccountable foundations and, on the first day of a major environmental and economic accord to which the Prime Minister committed this country, we have no plan whatsoever and the Prime Minister does not speak about it. His only speech is on his new-found passion for same sex marriage because it is the only proposal of significance he has been able to lay before the House of Commons.

The greater tragedy is the greater message in his speech, that if we do not accept his particular views on this legislation, then we are not truly Canadian. That is something that this party will never accept.

In the course of the debate I will be very critical of the government for many of its statements and actions in its attempts to abolish the traditional definition of marriage in Canada.

However I want to take this opportunity to thank the government, or maybe, ironically, I should be thanking the Supreme Court of Canada for at least one thing. At long last the question of marriage has been returned to where it should have been from the beginning: in the Parliament of Canada.

[Translation]

Hon. Stephen Harper (Calgary Southwest, CPC): Do you remember when the Prime Minister was a leadership candidate and wanted a democratic and respectful debate on this issue. On this side of the House, we hope that he and the members of his party will keep that promise during the course of this debate.

●(1550)

[English]

In August 2003, the Prime Minister, then a candidate for the Liberal leadership, who seemed very concerned with democracy and parliamentary reform, said that, “The courts having spoken, I believe that it's very important that Parliament speaks and that Parliament speaks through the voices of its representatives: members of Parliament. And what that essentially means is that this has got to be a debate that is civil, not a debate on which either side ascribes motivation, questions the motivation or ascribes blame, that in fact that the debate really deal with the fundamental social values of the country. And I think that that is what's going to happen”.

“There are going to be people who are going to raise other ways of looking at this. There are going to be people who will deal, for instance, who are going to raise the issue of civil union. And it may well be that they will raise solutions to the impediment that civil unions might provide. And I think that's an essential role of Parliament. And I think it's the kind of thing we should listen to”.

The Prime Minister had it right then, back in his democratic deficit fighting days as a leadership candidate. I hope he will remember his words of a year and a half ago and will not resort to the questioning of motives that he, his justice minister and others have increasingly resorted to in recent weeks when we propose the very policy on this issue that the Prime Minister used to win the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada.

As the Prime Minister invited us to do, I do want to engage in this debate about fundamental social values. I do want to discuss how compromise proposals like civil unions may be able to resolve some of the impediments the Prime Minister noted. I hope the Prime Minister will extend to me and roughly half the members of the House and roughly two-thirds of the country who support the traditional definition of marriage, the courtesy of an open debate without facing spurious charges of bigotry or bad faith from the Prime Minister, his spin doctors or his media allies.

●(1555)

[Translation]

My position on the definition of marriage is well known, because it is quite clear. It is not derived from personal prejudice or political tactics, as some Liberal MPs would have us believe with their usual air of moral superiority. My position, and that of most of the members of my party, is based on a very solid foundation and time tested values.

I also want to point out that the members of my party, including those in our shadow cabinet, are perfectly free to vote according to their conscience without my interference.

Government Orders

[English]

It will come as no surprise to anybody to know that I support the traditional definition of marriage as a union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, as expressed in our traditional common law. I believe this definition of marriage has served society well, has stood the test of time and is in fact a foundational institution of society. In my view the onus is on those who want to overturn such a fundamental social institution to prove that it is absolutely necessary, that there is no other compromise that can respect the rights of same sex couples while still preserving one of the cornerstones of our society and its many cultures.

Up until a few years ago, even within the modern era of the charter, Canadian law and Canadian society took for granted that marriage was intrinsic, by definition, an opposite sex institution. So obvious was this that until now a formal marriage statute has never been adopted by Parliament. This view was not even restricted to the numerous faces and cultures that have populated our great country from all corners of the earth, though it has been a universal view among them.

It has been a widespread view beyond religion as well. For example, the renowned McGill medical and legal ethicist, Dr. Margaret Somerville, a secular scholar operating in a public university without confessional or religious orientation, has argued that marriage is inherently an opposite sex institution. She points out that while social institutions can and should change in some of their accidental trappings, there are also inherent features that cannot change. As she writes:

Institutions have both inherent and collateral features. Inherent features define the institution and cannot be changed without destroying the institution. Collateral features can be changed without such impact. We rightly recognized that women must be treated as equal partners with men within marriage. While that changed the power of husbands over their wives, it simply changed a collateral feature of marriage. Recognizing same-sex marriage would change its inherent nature.

In a similar vein, former Supreme Court Justice Gérard La Forest, speaking on behalf of four judges in the majority in the Egan decision, the last case by the way where the Supreme Court addressed the definition of marriage directly, famously said the following:

Marriage has from time immemorial been firmly grounded in our legal tradition, one that is itself a reflection of long-standing philosophical and religious traditions. But its ultimate *raison d'être* transcends all of these and is firmly anchored in the biological and social realities that heterosexual couples have the unique ability to procreate, that most children are the product of these relationships, and that they are generally cared for and nurtured by those who live in that relationship. In this sense, marriage is by nature heterosexual.

I point out again, this is what the Supreme Court of Canada actually said, not, as the Prime Minister emphasizes, mere speculation about what it may say in the future. The statement was also written in 1995, over a decade after adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it remains the only commentary on the fundamental definition of marriage in any Supreme Court decision.

Even years after Justice La Forest's statements, members of the Liberal government still denied any hidden agenda to change the definition of marriage. In fact, the Deputy Minister stood in the House in 1999 and said the following on behalf of the government:

We on this side agree that the institution of marriage is a central and important institution in the lives of many Canadians. It plays an important part in all societies worldwide, second only to the fundamental importance of family to all of us.

The institution of marriage is of great importance to large numbers of Canadians, and the definition of marriage as found in the hon. member's motion is clear in law.

As stated in the motion, the definition of marriage is already clear in law. It is not found in a statute, but then not all law exists in statutes, and the law is no less binding and no less the law because it is found in the common law instead of in a statute.

The definition of marriage, which has been consistently applied in Canada, comes from an 1866 British case which holds that marriage is "the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others". That case and that definition are considered clear law by ordinary Canadians, by academics and by the courts. The courts have upheld the constitutionality of that definition.

• (1600)

The Ontario Court, General Division, recently upheld in *Layland and Beaulne* the definition of marriage. In that decision a majority of the court stated the following:

—unions of persons of the same sex are not "marriages", because of the definition of marriage. The applicants are, in effect, seeking to use s. 15 of the Charter to bring about a change in the definition of marriage. I do not think the Charter has that effect.

I am aware, as are other ministers, that recent court decisions and resulting media coverage have raised concern around the issue of same sex partners. It appears that the hon. member believes that the motion is both necessary and effective as a means to keep the Government of Canada from suddenly legislating the legalization of same sex marriages. That kind of misunderstanding of the intention of the government should be corrected.

Let me state again for the record that the government has no intention of changing the definition of marriage or of legislating same sex marriages.

I fundamentally do not believe that it is necessary to change the definition of marriage in order to accommodate the equality issues around same sex partners which now face us as Canadians. The courts have ruled that some recognition must be given to the realities of unmarried cohabitation in terms of both opposite sex and same sex partners. I strongly believe that the message to the government and to all Canadian governments from the Canadian public is a message of tolerance, fairness and respect for others.

Marriage has fundamental value and importance to Canadians and we do not believe on this side of the House that importance and value is in any way threatened or undermined by others seeking to have their long term relationships recognized. I support the motion for maintaining the clear legal definition of marriage in Canada as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

Thus spoke at great length the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, then justice minister, in this chamber less than six years ago.

Today, for making statements that are identical and for identical reasons, members of the government side resort to terms like bigot, reactionary and human rights violators. The hypocrisy and intellectual dishonesty of the government and some of its members at this point is frankly staggering.

Fundamentally, what has changed since the government, including the Prime Minister, voted for the traditional definition of marriage in 1999?

On this side, we do not believe that merely on the basis of lower court decisions, upheld only because the government refused to appeal, them that a fundamental social institution must be abolished or irretrievably altered. Only a free vote of the Parliament of Canada is an appropriate way to resolve such fundamental social issues.

Government Orders

As I say, I have made it clear that I and most of the members on this side of the House will vote against the bill as it now stands. We will vote to uphold the traditional definition of marriage. Those in this party, even in my shadow cabinet who consciously feel different, who believe that the definition of marriage should change, will have the full rights to express and vote their position on this subject.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

My party wanted to adopt a reasonable position respectful of every social group. We also think our position represents the feelings and convictions of the majority of Canadians.

[*English*]

As the official opposition in a minority Parliament, we feel it is insufficient to oppose. We must also put forward a constructive alternative. We have discussed this issue and wrestled with this issue in our own caucus, as have Canadians in living rooms, kitchens, coffee shops and church basements across the country.

I know and we all know and understand that this is difficult. The issue involves all kinds of aspects of life that are very close to personal identity, to sexual identity which for many people has been a difficult path, cultural tradition and ethnic identity and of course personal faith in one's relationship to their God.

However, while there is no perfect answer, and there is no perfect answer that will satisfy everyone, we believe we can and should offer a compromise that would win the support of the vast majority of Canadians who seek some middle ground on the issue.

In our discussion with Canadians we find there are three groups in public opinion.

At the one end there is a significant body of opinion, led today by the Prime Minister, which believes that the equality rights of gays and lesbians trump all other considerations, trumping any rights to religious faith, any religious expression or any multicultural diversity, and that any restriction on the right to same sex marriage is unjustifiable discrimination and a denial of human rights.

At the other end, there is an equally significant body that thinks that marriage is such a fundamental social institution, not only recognized by law but sanctified by faith throughout the world and throughout history, that any compromise in terms of recognizing homosexual relationships is unacceptable.

However, we believe that the vast majority of Canadians believe in some aspects of both and they are somewhere in the middle. They believe that marriage is a fundamental distinct institution, but that same sex couples can have equivalent rights and benefits and should be recognized and protected.

We believe that our proposals speak to the majority of Canadians who stand in this middle ground and frankly, who seek such a middle ground. Our proposal is that the law should continue to recognize the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, but at the same time we would propose that other forms of union, however structured, by appropriate provincial legislation, whether called registered partnerships, domestic partnerships, civil unions or

whatever, should be entitled to the same legal rights, privileges and obligations as marriage.

Many of these types of unions are already subject to provincial jurisdiction under their responsibility for civil law. However, there are issues affecting rights and benefits within the federal domain, and our party would ensure that for all federal purposes those Canadians living in other forms of union would be recognized as having equal rights and benefits under federal law as well.

What we put forward, in my judgment, is the real Canadian way. The Canadian way is not the blindly, ideological interpretation of the charter put forward by the Prime Minister. It is not a case where one side utterly vanquishes the other in a difficult debate on social issues. It is a constructive way, and as debate in other jurisdictions has shown, and I draw this to the attention of the House, this debate will not reach a conclusion or social peace until equal rights, multi-cultural diversity and religious freedom are balanced.

[*Translation*]

We also oppose the government's bill because it is a clear threat to religious freedom. We are proposing amendments that will prevent any religious discrimination within the sphere of federal authority.

[*English*]

This bill, by failing to find a reasonable compromise, a reasonable middle ground on the central question of marriage, is fundamentally flawed.

There is a second major flaw. The so-called protection that the government has offered for even basic religious freedom is, frankly, laughably inadequate. It is totally dishonest to suggest that it provides real protection.

The government has only proposed one meagre clause to protect religious freedom, a clause which states that religious officials will not be forced to solemnize marriages, but the Supreme Court of Canada has already ruled that this clause is ultra vires. It falls within the provincial responsibility for the solemnization of marriage. Frankly, this section of the bill illustrates the depth of the government's hypocrisy and intellectual dishonesty in this legislation.

On the one hand, the government and its allies claim that any attempt to retain the traditional definition of marriage is unconstitutional on the basis of a decision the Supreme Court has not made and has refused to make. On the other hand, it is happy to insert into its bill a clause which the Supreme Court has already ruled is unconstitutional and outside of federal jurisdiction.

Government Orders

The government's constitutionally useless clause purports to protect churches and religious officials from being forced to solemnize same sex marriages against their beliefs, but this threat has always been only one of many possibilities. We note the Prime Minister did not choose to address a single other possibility. What churches, temples, synagogues and mosques fear today is not immediately the future threat of forced solemnization, but dozens of other threats to religious freedom, some of which have already begun to arrive and some of which will arrive more quickly in the wake of this bill.

As Catholic priest and writer, Father Raymond de Souza wrote last year in the prestigious religious journal *First Things*:

That is the worst-case scenario of state expansion. But state expansion will likely pass other milestones on its way there, eroding religious liberty on questions related to marriage. First it will be churches forced to rent out their halls and basements for a same-sex couple's wedding reception. Then it will be religious charities forced to recognize employees in same-sex relationships as legally married. Then it will be religious schools not being allowed to fire a teacher in a same-sex marriage. Then it will be a hierarchical or synodal church not being allowed to discipline an errant priest or minister who performs a civilly legal but canonically illicit same-sex marriage. All of this can happen short of the worst-case scenario specifically exempted in the federal government's proposed law.

We have already seen some of these things come to pass since this article was written in human rights tribunals and lower courts across the country. We have already seen a Catholic Knights of Columbus hall challenged before the B.C. Human Rights Commission for refusing to grant permission for a same sex wedding reception on church owned property.

We have seen civil marriage commissioners in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, who have religious or philosophical objections to same sex marriage, removed or threatened to be removed from positions by their government. We have heard the federal Minister responsible for Democratic Reform saying such employees should be punished or fired.

We have seen the Minister of International Trade saying that churches, including the Catholic Church in Quebec, have no right to be involved in any such debate. These may only be the beginning of a chilling effect on religious freedom for those groups and individuals who continue not to believe in same sex marriage.

Indeed, given the ferocity of the Prime Minister's new position, given the refusal to compromise, given the belief that any opposition to same sex marriage is akin to racial discrimination, the attack on religious freedom will inevitably continue on any aspect of religion that interfaces in any way with public life.

There are things, of course, that are within the federal sphere that can protect religious freedom. Parliament can ensure that no religious body will have its charitable status challenged because of its beliefs or practices regarding them. Parliament could ensure that beliefs and practices regarding marriage will not affect the eligibility of a church, synagogue, temple or religious organization to receive federal funds, for example, federal funds for seniors' housing or for immigration projects run by a church.

● (1610)

Parliament could ensure that the Canadian Human Rights Act or the Broadcasting Act are not interpreted in a way that would prevent the expression of religious beliefs regarding marriage.

Should the bill survive second reading, we will propose amendments in areas like these to ensure that in all areas subject to federal jurisdiction nobody will be discriminated against on the basis of their religious beliefs or practices regarding marriage.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister and several of his ministers have dishonestly claimed that the use of the notwithstanding clause was inevitable in order to preserve the traditional definition of marriage. That is not true, and such arguments are unworthy of a conscientious parliamentarian, especially someone who is a lawyer.

In fact, this Parliament can protect the institution of traditional marriage very well and respect the rights and privileges of those who chose another form of union, without departing from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in our Constitution.

● (1615)

[*English*]

Some people have suggested that we cannot do what we propose to do; that is, preserve marriage as the union of one man and one woman while extending equal rights and other forms of union without invoking the notwithstanding clause of the Constitution.

I am going to take a little time on this. It is red herring argument, but we might as well spell it out. The attack is dishonest on several levels. First of all, and this is important when we start talking about the notwithstanding clause, the Liberal Party and this Prime Minister have no leg to stand on when it comes to preaching about protecting human rights and the notwithstanding clause. It was none other than Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, the author of the charter, who accepted the notwithstanding clause. Far from believing it to be a necessary evil to win support for the charter, he promised to use it. Specifically, he promised the late Cardinal Gerald Emmett Carter that he would use the notwithstanding clause to uphold Canada's legislation on abortion if it were struck down by a future Supreme Court.

In the more recent debate over same sex marriage, in an earlier phase of it, this Prime Minister promised that he would use the notwithstanding clause should a court ever infringe on religious freedom, although of course no one takes his commitments to religion seriously any more.

In fact, this Prime Minister was a member of Parliament from Quebec in 1989 when the provincial government in his province used the notwithstanding clause to ban English on commercial signs. He had next to nothing to say about it then and in the subsequent Liberal leadership race in less than a year he supported the notwithstanding clause.

Government Orders

I have said I would not use section 33 to preserve the traditional definition of marriage because quite simply it is not necessary in this case. The Supreme Court of Canada has not ruled on the constitutionality of the traditional definition of marriage. The court pointedly declined to do so in the recent same sex reference case, despite a clear request from the Prime Minister that it do so. In fact, the court openly speculated on the possibility that it could uphold the traditional definition. Therefore, there is simply no reason to use or discuss the notwithstanding clause in the absence of a Supreme Court decision, especially when it involves precedent based only on common law judgments.

Many legal experts, many of them coincidentally people who have been activists involved in these cases or who are close to the Liberal government, have said that the courts are likely to rule that the traditional definition of marriage is unconstitutional, but these same legal experts said that the Supreme Court would find the traditional definition of marriage unconstitutional in the reference case and they were wrong.

We have no reason to believe that the crystal balls in the justice department or in the law faculties are operating any better after the reference case than they did before it. Furthermore, up until now the courts have largely been interpreting a common law definition of marriage; in other words, previous court judgments not statutes reflecting the democratic will of Parliament. The courts have indicated clearly that statute law requires greater deference than common law.

In the case of *R. v. Swain* in 1991 then Chief Justice Lamer wrote in the majority the following:

Parliament, because of judicial deference, need not always choose the absolutely least intrusive means to attain its objectives but must come within a range of means which impair Charter rights as little as is reasonably possible. There is no room for judicial deference, however, where a common law, judge-made rule is challenged under the Charter.

There are several precedents of Parliament passing statutes without using the notwithstanding clause to reverse decisions made by the courts including the Supreme Court under common law and the courts have accepted these exercises of parliamentary sovereignty.

For instance, in 1995 Parliament passed Bill C-72 reversing the Supreme Court's decision in *Daviault*, a decision which allowed extreme intoxication as a criminal defence.

• (1620)

In 1996 Parliament passed Bill C-46 reversing the Supreme Court's decision in *O'Connor*, which allowed the accused to access medical records of the victims in sexual assault cases. When this new law was challenged in the subsequent *Mills* case, the Supreme Court ruled in a decision by Justices McLachlin and Iacobucci:

It does not follow from the fact that a law passed by Parliament differs from a regime envisaged by the Court in the absence of a statutory scheme, that Parliament's law is unconstitutional. Parliament may build on the Court's decision, and develop a different scheme as long as it remains constitutional. Just as Parliament must respect the Court's rulings, so the Court must respect Parliament's determination that the judicial scheme be improved. To insist on slavish conformity would belie the mutual respect that underpins the relationship between the courts and legislature that is so essential to our constitutional democracy.

We have every reason to believe that the Supreme Court, if it were eventually asked to rule on a new statutory definition of marriage combined with full and equal recognition of legal rights and benefits for same sex couples might well choose to act in a much more deferential manner toward the Canadian Parliament than lower courts showed toward ancient, British made, common law definitions.

I should point out that I am far from alone in saying this. Law Professor Alan Brudner at the University of Toronto wrote in the *Globe and Mail*:

—the judicially declared unconstitutionality of the common law definition of marriage does not entail the unconstitutionality of parliamentary legislation affirming the same definition.

He cited *R. v. Swain* and wrote, “For all we know, therefore, courts may uphold opposite sex marriage as a reasonable limit on the right against discrimination when the restriction comes from a democratic body”.

To those in government, in academia and the media who have argued that a pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause is the only way to uphold the traditional definition of marriage, he said the following:

These arguments misconceive the role of a notwithstanding clause in a constitutional democracy. Certainly, that role cannot be to protect laws suspected of being unconstitutional against judicial scrutiny....Rather, the legitimate role of a notwithstanding clause in a constitutional state is to provide a democratic veto over a judicial declaration of invalidity, where the court's reasoning discloses a failure to defer to the parliamentary body on a question of political discretion....But if that is true, then the notwithstanding clause should be invoked by Parliament only after the Supreme Court has ruled on the constitutionality of a law. And neither it, nor any provincial court outside Quebec has yet ruled on whether democratic legislation restricting marriage to heterosexual couples is valid.

I would add, and this is important, that Professor Brudner is neither a supporter of my party nor even a supporter of my position on the marriage issue. He was not even an adviser to my leadership campaign, unlike the principal organizer of a recent letter from a group of law professors backing the minister's decision.

In short, we have every reason to believe if the House moved to bring in a reasonable, democratic, compromise solution, one which defined in statute that marriage remains the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, which extended equal rights and benefits to couples living in other forms of unions, and which fully protected freedom of religion to the extent possible under federal law, that the Supreme Court of Canada would honour such a decision by Parliament.

The courts refused to answer the Prime Minister's question on the constitutional validity of the common law opposite sex definition of marriage because they did not want to pre-empt the work of Parliament. That suggests to me that they would be even more likely to defer to the judgment of Parliament when faced with a recently passed statute.

Government Orders

The members of the House, starting with the Minister of Justice, should actually read the same sex reference decision. I ask, if the Supreme Court actually believed that the traditional definition of marriage was a fundamental violation of human rights as, say, restricting aboriginal Canadians or non-Caucasian immigrants from voting, do we really think the Supreme Court would have engaged in an analysis of the possibility that it could uphold such a law even hypothetically? The answer is, of course not.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

The government has also claimed and is still claiming that marriage between persons of the same sex is a fundamental right. That is another erroneous opinion and a totally specious argument the government wants to spread. Government spokespersons bring disgrace on themselves, however, when they wrongly try to invoke the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to cover up their threadbare arguments.

[*English*]

I want to address an even more fundamental question. That is the question of the issue of human rights as it pertains to same sex marriage and the use and the abuse of the term "human rights" in this debate which has been almost without precedent.

Fundamental human rights are not a magician's hat from which new rabbits can constantly be pulled out. The basic human rights we hold dear: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, and equality before the law, the kind of rights that are routinely violated by the Prime Minister's good friends in states such as Libya and China, are well understood and recognized around the world. These rights do not depend on Liberal bromides or media spinners for their defence.

The Prime Minister cannot through grand rhetoric turn his political decision to change the definition of marriage into a basic human right because it is not. It is simply a political judgment. It is a valid political option if one wants to argue for it; it is a mistaken one in my view, but it is only a political judgment. Same sex marriage is not a human right. This is not my personal opinion. It is not the opinion of some legal adviser. This reality has already been recognized by such international bodies as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Speaker, I refer you to New Zealand's Quilter case. In 1997 the New Zealand court of appeal was asked to rule on the validity of the common law definition of marriage in light of the New Zealand bill of rights which, unlike our charter, explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. New Zealand's court ruled that the opposite sex requirement of marriage was not discriminatory. So the plaintiffs in this case made a complaint to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights that the New Zealand court violated the international covenant for the protection of rights to which New Zealand, like Canada, is a signator. But the UNCHR rejected this complaint in 2002, in effect upholding that same sex marriage is not a basic universal human right.

If same sex marriage were a fundamental human right, we have to think about the implications. If same sex marriage were a fundamental right, then countries as diverse as the United Kingdom,

France, Denmark and Sweden are human rights violators. These countries, largely under left wing governments, have upheld the traditional definition of marriage while bringing in equal rights and benefits regimes for same sex couples, precisely the policy that I and the majority of the Conservative caucus propose.

Even those few countries that have brought in same sex marriage at the national level, currently only the Netherlands and Belgium, did not do so because their own courts or international bodies had defined this as a matter of human rights. They did so simply as the honest public policy choice of their legislatures. In fact, both the Netherlands and Belgium legislated some differences in same sex marriage as opposed to opposite sex marriage in many areas but particularly in areas like adoption.

In other words, no national or international court, or human rights tribunal at the national or international level, has ever ruled that same sex marriage is a human right.

The Minister of Justice, when he was an academic and not a politician, would have appreciated the distinction between a legal right conferred by positive law and a fundamental human right which all people should enjoy throughout the world. Today he is trying to conflate these two together, comparing a newly invented Liberal policy to the basic and inalienable rights and freedoms of humanity.

I have to say the government appears incapable of making these distinctions. On the one hand the Liberals are friends of dictatorships that routinely violate human rights to whom they look for photo ops or corporate profits. On the other hand they condemn those who disagree with their political decisions as deniers of human rights, even though they held the same positions themselves a few years, or even a few months ago.

• (1630)

Quite frankly the Liberal Party, which drapes itself in the charter like it drapes itself in the flag, is in a poor position to boast about its human rights record. Let us not forget it was the Liberal Party that said none is too many when it came to Jews fleeing from Hitler. It was the Liberal Party that interned Japanese Canadians in camps on Canada's west coast, an act which Pierre Trudeau refused to apologize or make restitution for, leaving it to Brian Mulroney to see justice done. Just as it was Mr. Mulroney and Mr. Diefenbaker who took the great initiatives against apartheid, Mr. Diefenbaker with his Bill of Rights, and I did not see a notwithstanding clause in that. It was the Liberal Party that imposed the War Measures Act.

Today it is the Liberal Party that often puts its business interests ahead of the cause of democracy and human rights in places like China. Recently in China it was the member for Calgary Southeast who had to act on human rights while the Prime Minister went through the diplomatic moves.

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The Liberal Party has spent years repressing free speech rights of independent political organizations from Greenpeace to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that might want to speak out at election time. It has consistently violated property rights and has put the rights of criminals ahead of those of law abiding gun owners. The Liberal government has ignored the equality rights of members of minority religious groups in education in the province of Ontario even after international tribunals have demanded action.

I am not here to say that this party's or this country's record on human rights is perfect. It is far from perfect; we can read about it in any number of places. However, the Liberal Party of Canada is simply in no position, either past or present, to lecture anyone about charter rights or human rights.

[*Translation*]

In this debate the government has resorted at times to demagoguery, attacking our position with equal intellectual dishonesty. The government has demonstrated its fundamental disregard for the opinions of a majority of Canadian men and women of good will.

In particular, it has been unforgivably insensitive with regard to all cultural communities in this country for which marriage is a most deeply rooted value.

[*English*]

Nowhere have the Liberals been more vociferous in their attempts to link same sex marriage to minority rights than among Canada's ethnic and cultural minority communities. Yet at the same time, they have clearly wanted these communities excluded from this debate. Why? Because, to their embarrassment, the vast majority of Canada's cultural communities, setting aside those groups dependent on Liberal funding, see through the Liberals' attempt to link basic human rights to the government's opposition to their traditional practices of marriage.

Many new Canadians chose this country, fleeing regimes that did and do persecute religious, ethnic and political minorities. They know what real human rights abuses are. They know that recognizing traditional marriage in law while granting equal benefits to same sex couples is not a human rights abuse akin to what they may have seen in Rwanda or China or Iran.

What these new Canadians also understand, and what this government does not, is that there are some things more fundamental than the state and its latest fad. New Canadians know that marriage and family are not the creature of the state but pre-exist the state and that the state has some responsibility to uphold and defend these institutions.

New Canadians know that their deeply held cultural traditions and religious belief in the sanctity of marriage as a union of one man and one woman will be jeopardized by a law which declares them unconstitutional and brands their supporters as human rights violators.

New Canadians know that their cultural values are likely to come under attack if this law is passed. They know that we are likely to see disputes in the future over charitable status for religious or cultural organizations that oppose same sex marriage, or over school

curriculum and hiring standards in both public and private religious and cultural minority schools.

New Canadians, many of whom have chosen Canada as a place where they can practise their religion and raise their family in accordance with their beliefs and without interference from the state, know that these legal fights will limit and restrict their freedom to honour their faith and their cultural practices.

Of course, in all of these cases, courts and human rights commissions will attempt to balance the basic human rights of freedom of religion and expression with the newly created legal right to same sex marriage, but as our justice critic has remarked, we have a pattern: wherever courts and tribunals are faced with a clash between equality rights and religious rights, equality rights seem to trump.

The Liberals may blather about protecting cultural minorities, but the fact is that undermining the traditional definition of marriage is an assault on multiculturalism and the practices in those communities.

All religious faiths traditionally have upheld the belief that marriage is a child-centred union of a man and a woman, whether Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh or Muslim. All of these cultural communities, rooted in those faiths, will find their position in society marginalized.

I believe the Liberal vision of multiculturalism is really just a folkloristic one. The Liberals invite Canadians from cultural communities to perform folk dances and wear colourful costumes, but they are not interested in the values, beliefs and traditions of new Canadians unless they conform to the latest fashions of Liberalism. All races, colours and creeds are welcome in Liberal Canada as long as they check their faith and conscience at the door.

That may be the Liberal vision for Canada in the 21st century, but it is not ours. In our Canada, vibrant cultural communities will be allowed to share not only their food and their dress but their beliefs and aspirations for themselves and their families.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

The conscience of all members of this House is involved in the decision we must reach. I urge all the men and women sitting here today to set aside all partisan considerations and all personal ambitions, in this extraordinary situation, and to listen to the voice of their conscience and the voice of their duty, as representatives of the people of Canada. Yes, this decision may have repercussions in a day or in a month, but we must make it while thinking of past and future generations.

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[English]

The decision that we are being asked to make on this bill is a difficult one. For many, the decision we make on the bill will be one of the most difficult decisions they will be called upon to make as members of Parliament, but before we all do so, let us remember one thing clearly, because this is where I object most strongly to what the Prime Minister said.

Regardless of what the Prime Minister says, we all do have a choice in the position we take here. We all know that the House is closely divided. I think we all know that if it were a truly free vote, if the ministers like the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the government House leader, the Minister of Natural Resources, the associate Minister of National Defence, the Minister of State for Northern Ontario, and many others, were free to vote their consciences, we know this bill would fail.

This bill is too important to be decided on the basis of a whipped vote, whether the formal whip that is being applied to a minister, or the informal carrots and sticks that are being applied to other members. I appeal to the consciences of those on the government side.

I know that many of the government members in their hearts believe in the traditional definition of marriage and know that we are talking about this today only because the Prime Minister has literally no other legislation for Parliament.

I ask them to join with us to defeat the bill and urge the adoption of another which reflects the practice in other advanced democracies and which reflects our own honourable traditions of compromise.

There are fundamental questions here. Will this society be one which respects the longstanding basic social institution of marriage or will it be one that believes even our most basic structures can be reinvented overnight for the sake of political correctness?

Will this society be one which respects and honours the religious and cultural minorities or one which gradually whittles away their freedoms and their ability to practise their beliefs?

Will this be a country in which Parliament will rule on behalf of the people or one where a self-selected group of lawyers or experts will define the parameters of right and wrong?

All of these questions are in our hands to answer. It is up to all of our consciences. It is not what the Prime Minister and the PMO advisers tell us is most expedient; it should be based on our consciences and what our constituents tell us to do.

Mr. Speaker, before I leave the floor, I would like to move an amendment. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "that" and substituting the following:

This House declines to give second reading to Bill C-38, an act respecting certain aspects of legal capacity for marriage for civil purposes, since the principle of the bill fails to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others and fails to recognize and extend to other civil unions established under the laws of a province, the same rights, benefits and obligations as married persons.

• (1640)

The Speaker: The question is on the amendment. Resuming debate.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions with the other parties and I believe that you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That today's government orders be extended to allow for one speaker from each recognized party on Bill C-38.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the debate taking place in this chamber today is a fundamental one. The very fact that we can debate, in all civility, a matter as emotionally charged as same sex marriage is proof of the democratic nature of Quebec and Canadian societies.

Not that long ago, less than a century ago even, women did not have access to another fundamental institution: the right to vote. We have come a long way since then. Today, no one would dare challenge women's right to vote, because it is a fundamental right.

In another hundred years, I believe no one will be challenging the right of two persons of the same sex to join together in the institution of marriage on the same basis as a man and woman. This particular change is part of a broader, universal movement to advance rights and democracy. We must bear this in mind when we are called upon to vote on this matter.

Setting partisanship and even religious and political convictions aside, we must ask ourselves how we would answer another human being who wants to marry his or her partner of the same sex out of love and asks us "Why are you denying me marriage?". Does this mean that love between same sex partners is not equal to that between a man and a woman? Does this mean that love between partners of the same sex does not exist, or should not exist?

Are there still MPs in this place who believe that love, whether it be between two people of the same sex or between a man and a woman, is something to be condemned? I would ask my colleagues to ask themselves this before voting: If they have a son or daughter, or even a grandson or grand-daughter, who some day wants to marry their same sex partner, and this beloved person cannot do so, what answer will they have to justify such a blatant infringement of basic human rights? How will they be able to console this family member, who has realized that he or she is, ultimately, a second-class citizen?

The debate on same sex marriage is, ultimately, a question of citizenship. No one can say that Quebec or Canada are just societies if the people of this country are not all treated equally.

Despite its tragedies, the French Revolution represents an important milestone in the long history of democracy and law. The expression *liberty, fraternity, equality* is an integral part of this debate. All human beings are born free and equal under the law. Do we believe that all Quebecers and all Canadians are born free and equal under the law? If we do believe this, we must, in good conscience, vote in favour of the bill this government has finally introduced. If we believe, as I do, that giving women the right to vote was true democratic progress, we must vote in favour of this bill.

Government Orders

Fraternity means that a human being necessarily considers all other human beings brothers and sisters. There are nations and there is also the great human family. When it is a question of fundamental rights, which are universal rights, it is a question of human fraternity. Fraternity means that we, particularly those of us elected to represent the public, must consider the suffering of our fellow citizens and do everything we can to eliminate that suffering. We have an opportunity to do so with this bill.

Gays and lesbians have suffered countless acts of discrimination over the years and even centuries.

● (1645)

When a man or a woman realizes that he or she is a homosexual and faces discrimination, rejection and denial of rights, they suffer. This can end in tragedy, driving some to suicide.

One thing is certain: as long as the love shared by same sex partners is not recognized as something totally normal and acceptable, this suffering will continue. Parliamentarians alone cannot eliminate this suffering, but we can certainly send a very strong signal here, in Canada, and around the world by passing this bill.

In doing so, we will help alleviate human suffering. We will add a block to the democratic building which is slowly but surely being built year after year. We will help make our societies more just.

This bill does not legislate matters of the church or religion. It is clear that this bill does not interfere in any way in religious rites or practice. This bill will not require religious communities to marry same sex partners. We must therefore agree that this bill does not, in any way, take anything away from the various forms of worship in Quebec and Canada.

I have great respect for the hon. members' convictions, whether I share them or not. With all respect, I must reaffirm that the religion of some should not become the law for others. While the right to freedom of religion exists and ought to remain a basic principle of our societies, religion must not impose its own principles on society at large and serve as the foundation for the law governing us all.

Canada and Quebec are secular governments and have to remain secular. I do understand that, based on religious conviction or out of concern for faithfully representing our fellow citizens, some of us are feeling great pressure. However, this is a matter of conscience and if, when the time comes to vote, our conscience is at odds with our religious convictions and the opinion of the majority of our constituents, our conscience should prevail. As members of the House, how could we, in all good conscience, oppose liberty, equality and fraternity by voting against this bill?

Some people would reduce this debate to a purely legal level and say that same sex spouses do not need marriage, because they have access to civil union. I would point out that opposite sex spouses also have access to civil union. Why deny some people the rights that others enjoy? The question we are facing today is not only a legal one. Above all, it is a question of justice. It is a question of fundamental justice.

If a citizen has such health problems that he has become a danger to himself and others if he drives a car, the law may impose certain

restrictions. But, in the case of same sex spouses, there is no difference. To claim, for example, that marriage is an institution reserved for those who can procreate and that, therefore, same sex spouses should be excluded, is insulting and rather absurd.

If that were the case, couples would have to be examined before they married to see if they were able to conceive. All couples of a certain age would have to be excluded from marriage. We can quickly see how absurd this reasoning is. Some people also say that marriage is a very old institution and that it would be dangerous to overturn it. I remind the House that authoritarian regimes are also very old institutions.

● (1650)

Is that a reason for refusing to move forward and adopt democratic practices?

Women were kept out of public life for thousands of years. They still are, unfortunately, in many countries. Is that a reason to accept it? Of course not.

Our common goal, here in this House, is to move forward, is it not? Is it not our role to act as agents of change to improve the lives of our fellow citizens? We have the privilege, by adopting this law, of helping many of our fellow citizens. And in doing so, we take absolutely nothing away from others. Everyone will win.

This government, and especially this Prime Minister, dithered a long time before introducing this bill. The Prime Minister wiggled out the first time, before the last election, by referring the matter to the Supreme Court. And yet a host of courts had already clearly stated their positions on this issue. The Prime Minister has finally lived up to his responsibilities by introducing this bill.

Now, some people are talking about a referendum. That proposal, although it is cloaked in the appearance of democracy, is thoroughly anti-democratic. The rights of a minority cannot be left to the discretion of the majority. It is contrary to common sense and contrary to the spirit of justice.

It is our responsibility to decide whether or not to pass this bill. We cannot complain that this House does not get enough of a say, only to avoid issues when the going gets tough. The moment of truth is fast approaching. We must decide and decide we will.

For the past few centuries, the greatest advances of western society have not been technological, economic or the like. The greatest advances by our societies have been democratic and based on freedom, equality and fraternity. This slow but sure progress has brought us to where we are today.

I would certainly not want to return to the past when no one had the right to vote, when freedom was still a theoretical notion, when a minority had rights, but a vast majority had none. I would not want to return to a time when slavery was accepted because it had always been around. I would not want to return to the days of the Inquisition.

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To vote in favour of this bill is to embrace the progress that has been made in basic, universal rights. That is what we must do in all good conscience. In a few decades, the generations to come will find this perfectly natural. Historians will remark on the courage and sense of responsibility of the elected members of this House. They will remark on the fact that Quebec and Canada were trailblazers in the advancement of democratic civilization.

By voting in favour of this bill, we will be fully including gays and lesbians in our societies. We will be sending a very strong message that will surely make life a little easier for some of our fellow citizens. Of course some people will not be happy. But while this may go against their beliefs, they will not lose any rights. They will lose nothing but their illusions.

Marriage is a fundamental institution in our society. Let us ensure that Quebeckers and Canadians are born free and equal before the law. Let us ensure that Quebeckers and Canadians can live their entire life as equals before the law. For that to be the case, we must vote in favour of this bill.

• (1655)

Hon. Paul Harold Macklin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said that Parliament can legislate to preserve the traditional definition of marriage without invoking the notwithstanding clause, because the Supreme Court refused to answer the fourth question.

What does the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie have to say on this issue?

• (1700)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, first, I would say that the government should not have referred this bill to the Supreme Court, and that this is a question the answer to which we have known from the outset. We should have proceeded before the last election, regardless of the electoral considerations that were driving this government. Had it not been for the Prime Minister's dithering, the Leader of the Opposition would not have been able to raise this issue.

Having said that, in my opinion, there is no option but to use the notwithstanding clause if we want to prevent such a thing. Indeed, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms talks about reasonable limits, and it would be unreasonable to decide that, because of their sexual orientation, a man and a woman do not have the same rights. In my opinion, this is the fundamental issue.

I am also convinced that we must adopt this bill, and that we must do so at the earliest opportunity, to avoid dividing our society and to make it clear that the issues that we debated in the past, namely abortion and divorce—which took us to the same place—have now been accepted by society and are now behind us. Indeed, divorced people are no longer stigmatized, as they were in the 1960s.

Oddly, many people who were opposed to giving women the right to vote are now on the same side as those who, today, are opposed to same sex marriage.

This is what I meant when I talked about progress. Do we recognize that all people are born equal and free, and that they can live their lives equal and free? That is the fundamental issue.

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague and leader of the Bloc the following question.

One of the arguments presented by opponents of same sex marriage, as formulated by the leader of the opposition, is that of freedom of religion and the fear that adopting Bill C-38 would interfere with that freedom.

Is the opposite not true? In other words, is it not true that today, if the bill does not pass, and same sex marriage remains illegal, religious groups—I am thinking of the United Church, the Unitarian Church, the reformed branch of Judaism—who want to marry same sex couples, will not be able to do so because same sex marriage is illegal. If Bill C-38 does pass, it would permit these people—meaning these groups—who want to marry same sex couples to do so, while also protecting the right of the Catholic Church, the Baptist Church and other religious groups not to marry same sex couples if they so choose. In other words, will we not achieve the appropriate balance by protecting the right of some to perform marriages if they so choose and the right of others to not perform such marriages, if that is their choice?

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, I am in complete agreement with my colleague's logic. In short, it should be extremely clear that, in all the positions taken and all the legislation adopted here, the state must never impose rules on any religion. I think we all agree on this. However, I would also like us all to agree that religions must not impose rights and ways of doing things on the secular state.

I repeat: the religious beliefs of some must not become the law of the land. Respecting everyone means having deep respect for the religious beliefs of those who have them, but it also means respecting the beliefs of faiths other than our own. Those are two things.

It is extremely dangerous to have this confusion between state and church. This leads to the type of regime we condemn. This leads to the worst excesses. I am not targeting any religion in particular. All religions have experienced such excesses. I hope that, one day, all religions will repudiate them.

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the leader of the Bloc Québécois on his contention that the religion of some must not become the law of others. This is, without contradiction, the true expression of the freedom we would all like to enjoy in this country. Many religions want to impose their laws on the world. What matters is that, in our society, we are all free to pursue our own religions and values. This is the basis of Canadian society.

I would like to ask the hon. member this. I come from Toronto, which has a strong gay and lesbian community. I believe that this community makes a contribution to our city. I believe that their being free and able to contribute as full fledged citizens helps to enrich Canada. That will strengthen our rights.

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Would the hon. member agree that it is the same in Quebec? Our common rights are strengthened when we all enjoy the same rights and live in a society where everyone can contribute to the fullest of their abilities. Does the hon. member not agree with this statement as it relates to Quebec as well as to the rest of Canada?

•(1705)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely with that statement. As hon. members know, the level of democracy in a society is measured by the respect it shows to its minorities. If we want these people to contribute fully to the well-being and growth of society in all its forms, in economic, cultural or sports terms, one of the most important conditions is that they be allowed to grow and be happy instead of being stigmatized.

Too many people have not fulfilled their potential because they felt restricted by their sexual orientation. Many rejected it, trying to escape themselves. But we do not choose our sexual orientation: we are born with it. To deny the reality is to say to some people that they should not have been born. I shall never tolerate such a thing.

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member could help me out a little on the history around the world as we have looked at the issue of extending the vote to different people over time, and rightly so, but specifically with respect to extending the vote to women. It has been done in various regimes and was long overdue.

At the time the vote was extended to women, for example, were women called men? To my knowledge, that is not the case anywhere. When bringing a new group in to have those particular rights, one does not need to call them the same thing in order to give them the equal benefits and rights, which is what our party is proposing to do by giving equal benefits and rights without terming it the same.

Unless I missed something in history, and I am certainly open to being enlightened, has there ever been a time where, when extending the right to vote, women have been termed men?

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, the member certainly missed something in history, which is the evolution of society, and I am sure of that.

Women were not called men. They were called nobodies. They simply did not exist. That was the problem. I do not want the same situation where people who do not have the same rights simply do not exist. We do not want to live in that kind of society. I want everybody to exist, not just by having a name, but by having the same rights and living under the same conditions, all of us, not just those who are not gays or lesbians. This is a question of justice and living with our own identities. It is not more than that.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we debate this historic bill in the House of Commons, my province of Ontario is preparing legislation because same sex marriage is happening already in Ontario. In fact, the Ontario Conservatives do not want that to become a wedge issue and are consenting to move it quickly through the chamber.

If this is already granted in the province of Ontario because some religious denominations have already chosen this as part of their

faith service, how would he feel about having to strip that right away from that province?

•(1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, I think in this connection that we need to be very clear on the definition of marriage. I am a sovereigntist—I am not telling the member anything he does not already know—but, as long as we are part of Canada, this is the place where the matter has to be determined, and where we simply have to at last accept what the courts have said.

Nevertheless, marriage ceremonies are a provincial responsibility. I have trouble seeing how people could oppose decisions made here and all those made in the appeal courts of seven provinces and one territory, and now by the Supreme Court, with its opinion. I think we must be very clear on that point.

The battle will, however, have to be fought in each of these jurisdictions. Some people in some provinces might well be tempted to say that they will not respect the Supreme Court opinion and that they will use another clause. This might be a temptation for some. Freedom is never won once and for all time. The battle is ongoing. It must be waged with determination, and the lines must be drawn so that things are made clear and people eventually understand how society is changing. This sometimes take a while, but generally it does come to pass.

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the New Democratic Party, I am proud to lead off the debate today on Bill C-38, the civil marriage act.

I had hoped to be able to share this time with my leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, but he is still recovering from the appendix surgery he had on the weekend. I know we all want to wish him a quick recovery. As a long time supporter of the gay and lesbian community, I know he will be following the debate this afternoon with great interest.

I am proud today to speak to this important legislation as an openly gay man. Thirty-one years ago I was a 19 year old student at the beginning of my university career. I was struggling with coming out as a gay person. For years I had known the terrible isolation of being in the closet, holding a secret that I dare not tell anyone for fear I would be ostracized, beaten or worse.

As a young gay man I saw little hope of a relationship and certainly little hope of a relationship that would be celebrated and honoured as my parents' and grandparents' relationships had been celebrated and honoured. It just was not an option. Gay relationships when discussed at all were usually seen as fleeting, furtive, secretive. In my closet I was led to believe that promiscuity would be the only option if I was to live as an openly gay person.

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However that did not sit well with the values I had learned in my family, my church and my community. At that time my very limited experience in the gay community had not shown me other possibilities.

It was at that time that I heard in the media the story of a brave Winnipeg gay couple, Chris Vogel and Richard North. Back in 1974, Chris and Richard challenged the marriage laws and attempted to get a marriage licence in Manitoba. They did not get the licence but they found support in a Unitarian church where they were married after the reading of wedding bans. Their action meant so much to a closeted young man from a small Ontario city.

What a revelation they were to me. Imagine, two gay men willing to challenge the laws and challenge society to seek to make a lifelong commitment to each other. Perhaps after all there was hope that I too could find that kind of loving, creative, secure partnership.

It is not as though gay and lesbian couples were not making commitments to each other back then and for many years before that, but emerging from the isolation of the closet one really had to be lucky to find them.

When I moved to B.C. in 1979 the longest gay relationship I had personally ever encountered was one that lasted 11 months, and that was one of mine. Arriving in Vancouver, almost within weeks I met, through my church connections, two couples who had been together for over 25 years. I could not believe it. Bruce and Ed, Patrick and Rob seemed like the most remarkable people to me, making a relationship work in a society that refused to recognize the full worth of gay and lesbian people, making a relationship work without the support of family, the church, the law. It literally filled me with awe and with hope. Their example opened new possibilities for my life. I longed for the security of home and family. When I thought about a relationship that was my priority.

Twenty-four years ago I met my partner, Brian, at a meeting of gays and lesbians at the University of British Columbia held at the Lutheran Campus Centre. Twenty-four years ago we began a relationship that continues to this day.

In my relationship with Brian, I found the love I yearned for, the security I was seeking, the creative energy that nourishes me and the mystery that continues to astonish me.

Twenty-four years ago, Brian and I could not be married. We made our accommodation with those circumstances. We have been lucky to be supported in our life together by family, friends, colleagues and our church family. We have not yet chosen to be married but to have that choice is very important to us.

Chris Vogel and Richard North continue to celebrate anniversary after anniversary. Just recently, in fact on the same day the Supreme Court ruled on the government's reference on marriage, Chris and Richard received the Manitoba Human Rights Commitment Award for their many contributions to human rights in that province.

Chris and Richard have been joined by many other brave gay and lesbian couples in recent years, couples who have not been afraid to put their relationships in the public spotlight by challenging the laws on marriage which excluded them. These couples challenged the laws in Ontario, B.C., Quebec, Nova Scotia, Yukon, Manitoba,

Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador and they won their point. It is their efforts that have brought us to this debate today.

• (1715)

These couples have had an important effect on those around them. They have shown many people, whatever their sexual orientation, the importance of making a lifelong commitment. They have championed marriage as an institution of value and worth in our society. They have been role models for young gay and lesbian people who still, far too often, remain isolated and alone in communities in every corner of this country.

In a society where far too many gay and lesbian young people choose suicide, they have shown a way of hope, pride and possibility. In a world that cries out for love and commitment, for responsibility and for right relationship, these couples have had the courage to publicly celebrate their lives together. They have had the courage to call society out of its intolerance and prejudice. They have had the courage to honour an institution central to our society and central to many of our dreams and ideals.

It is not just the couples who challenged the law before the courts. Hundreds of gay and lesbian couples have been married in Canada in the past year. They are all witnesses to love and commitment, role models each and every one. This has not been an attempt to change our society's understanding of marriage. These are couples who sought to be included in marriage as we understand it today, not change its values, ideals or traditions. They have willingly and enthusiastically sought out its responsibilities, obligations and duties. They seek the stability it will allow for them, for their children and for their families.

The bill before us is also not an attempt to change marriage. The bill expands the definition of marriage to include gay and lesbian couples. It allows gay and lesbian couples to access civil marriage in Canada. It does not fiddle with the ideals of marriage, the responsibilities of marriage, the obligations of marriage. It merely acknowledges that the full equality of gay and lesbian Canadians demands our inclusion in marriage, our access to that institution.

On Monday, I was honoured to share a podium with my colleagues from Vancouver East and Hochelaga. My colleague from Hochelaga is also openly gay. I remember very fondly the day he came out publicly. In fact, I sent him a fan letter that day. I have great respect for his work toward the full equality of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in Quebec and Canada.

I am constantly proud to be associated with my sister from Vancouver East, who for many years was my member of Parliament and was the first member of Parliament in Canada to acknowledge that she was in a loving relationship with another woman. Her courage and her devotion to fighting for social change and justice inspire me daily.

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I was honoured to share a podium with these hon. members as we explained why this debate was so crucial to us as members of the gay and lesbian community and as MPs. We made it clear that for us, this debate was not an abstract intellectual exercise, but that instead it was about how we live and love intimately, how we make personal commitments, how we celebrate our relationships. We spoke about how respect for the institution of marriage was a prime characteristic of our community's effort in this debate. We spoke about how being excluded from a key institution of our society made us second class citizens. We spoke about our support for religious freedom in Canada. We spoke about our determination to carry out this debate with both respect and directness.

This issue is more than just the consideration of civil marriage. It is actually about the full citizenship of gay and lesbian people, our full citizenship. Gay and lesbian people cannot be considered full citizens if key institutions of our society are considered out of bounds to us. We cannot be considered full citizens if civil marriage, one of those central institutions, is seen to be outside our experience and our reach.

Separate or new institutions or legal arrangements will not meet the test of the value of our citizenship. Civil union applied only to gay and lesbian couples is not an answer because separate is not equal. Separate water fountains, separate sections on the bus, separate beaches, none of these are acceptable in societies that value the full equality of their people. I and my party believe the same is true of civil marriage.

This matter is not one that limits religious freedom. The bill takes great pain to be clear on that subject. We in the NDP support the protection of religious freedom. I personally, as an active member of the United Church of Canada, strongly support religious freedom. No mosque, no temple, no church, no synagogue and no clergy person should be forced to perform a marriage of a gay or lesbian couple if that act conflicts with their belief, practice or theology.

Religious organizations must make decisions about religious marriage. However, religious organizations that choose to solemnize the marriage of gay and lesbian couples should also be able to do so in exactly the same way they do for heterosexual couples. Whether that means marrying a couple who has obtained a marriage licence or being able to officially register the marriage of a couple for whom banns have been read, those religious organizations should have that ability guaranteed as part of our commitment to religious freedom.

The Metropolitan Community Church fully supports the marriage of gay and lesbian couples and has worked hard to realize this change. The Unitarian Church and the United Church of Canada have been leaders toward this change, as has the Canadian Coalition of Liberal Rabbis for Same-Sex Marriage. Ultimately this legislation is about state-defined civil marriage, not religious marriage.

• (1720)

Alex Munter, a spokesperson for Canadians for Equal Marriage, had high praise for Bill C-38. He said that the bill reflected the genius of Canada in the way in which it supported the full equality of gay and lesbian couples and at the same time provided for the protection of religious freedom.

I agree with Mr. Munter. The bill is indeed very Canadian. It provides for a difference of opinion, while both protecting and expanding basic rights important to Canadians.

Let me pay tribute to the efforts of Canadians for Equal Marriage and Egale Canada for their tireless work advocating for marriage rights for Canadians.

Not all gay and lesbian Canadians aspire to be married. Not all gay and lesbian couples in Canada will choose marriage. Some in our community have serious and important questions about the institution of marriage, and not all of our marriages will succeed. That is no different than the situation for heterosexual couples and straight people in Canada. In the same way that heterosexual couples have a choice to be married or not, I believe that gay and lesbian couples must have that same choice.

I know this issue is a difficult one for many members of Parliament. I know there are members who have been told that they are not welcome in their faith communities because of the position they have taken. I know all members have been flooded with letters of support and opposition to this legislation. I am well aware of the emotional toll that this debate is having.

As a gay man I can assure this House that gay and lesbian Canadians know all too well the risks associated with standing up for our full human rights. We know that we often lose friends, family connections, our welcome in faith communities and our jobs. We sometimes even experience intimidation and violence when we stand for our full inclusion in the community.

Let me assure my colleagues that there are joys associated with that risk too. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

I know that many of my constituents have strong feelings about this legislation. I have heard from thousands of people, many from Burnaby—Douglas, many from across Canada. My support for marriage will come as no surprise to my constituents. They know that I worked with my predecessor Svend Robinson over many years, supporting his early initiatives on this issue. People in Burnaby—Douglas respected Svend's position, even if they disagreed. He was always clear with them and accountable for his actions.

For my part, I too have been very clear about my stand. It came up regularly during last June's election campaign, in public meetings, in media interviews and on the doorstep. I never shied away from indicating that I would be a strong supporter and advocate for gay and lesbian marriage.

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I was not alone in that position among candidates in my riding. In fact, a very strong majority of voters in my riding cast their ballots for candidates who were committed to supporting this kind of legislation.

I know not everyone in Burnaby—Douglas supports this bill. I respect their position. I appreciate hearing from them about their concern. However, when the vote comes I will be voting in support, ensuring that gay and lesbian couples can be married in Canada.

I also want to speak about my party's position on this issue. The New Democratic Party of Canada has been on the record for many years as supporting gay and lesbian marriage. It has been part of our election platform. In fact, the party policy committed the NDP to changing the law to include gay and lesbian couples in marriage in our first term should we form government.

The policy went further. After democratic debate at a party convention, delegates voted for a motion that directed caucus to support this change as a fundamental issue of human rights.

I do not know of any of our party's policies where delegates actually called caucus members to a particular course of action. It tells Canadians of our party's commitment. I am proud that we in the NDP will perhaps have the strongest overall commitment to this change of any caucus represented here in the House.

There are disappointments for me associated with this debate. I am disappointed that it has taken the government so long to get this on the agenda of the House, forcing couples at great personal expense and risk to take their concerns to the courts. I think that the government tried to keep this matter off the agenda of the last election by its reference to the Supreme Court. I think that was just a delaying tactic.

I am disappointed too that if it was up to the Liberal and Conservative Parties this legislation would fail. This is particularly troubling, given the Prime Minister's stirring defence of the charter and human rights in Canada in the last days of the election campaign. The Prime Minister wrapped himself in the charter and pledged to defend those rights. Today we see the Liberal caucus divided on this matter.

Without the NDP and the strong support of the Bloc Québécois, the legislation would not have a hope.

I hope the Prime Minister appreciates that it is the commitment of these two opposition parties to the charter, to human rights, to the full equality of gays and lesbians that will ensure the legislation passes.

I am also disappointed in the position taken by the Conservative Party. Perhaps I should not be surprised given that party's consistent history of failing to support initiatives that address the equality of gay and lesbian Canadians.

● (1725)

However, the way in which the Conservatives have made their argument has been particularly problematic. We first heard how this legislation presented a slippery slope that would lead to polygamy, a notion roundly criticized in many quarters and that ignores the very real problems associated with polygamy that is practised in Canada

today. Then it was proposed that there could in fact be an opposite sex definition of marriage that would meet constitutional requirements without using the notwithstanding clause, a position that was denounced by over 130 legal and constitutional experts.

We then heard from the Conservatives that Canada's ethnic communities would not stand for including gays and lesbians in the institution of marriage, a suggestion that offended many in those communities and belied the political, social and religious diversity of ethnic communities in Canada.

And more recently, a longtime Conservative member of Parliament asserted that gay and lesbian Canadians were not discriminated against by the current definition of marriage because we were in fact free to marry a person of the opposite sex. There could be no position that denies the reality of our lives as gay and lesbian people more than that. It fundamentally denies the reality of our love, our commitments, our sexuality, our lives. It makes our love, our relationships invisible. I hope this is not a view that is widely shared in that party.

I have not heard effective reasons from the Conservatives yet, but I am willing to listen carefully to the debate in the coming days.

This legislation will be good for Canada. Because it recognizes the full equality of gay and lesbian couples, it will make a difference. Because it honours the institution of marriage by including couples who are dedicated to the ideals and responsibilities of that institution who do not take it for granted, who are willing to fight to be subject to its traditions and obligations, it will make a difference. Because it will bring joy to the very being of many people who will be able to make a commitment that they only dreamed might be possible or who have sought the opportunity to support gay and lesbian family members and friends find the important affirmation of their relationship, it will make a difference. Because it will say to people around the world that Canada honours and respects its gay and lesbian citizens and is prepared to bring them into full citizenship, leading not following the movement toward equality for gays and lesbians everywhere, it will make a difference.

Relationships are complicated. They are mysterious. They give meaning to our lives. For me, theologian Isobel Carter Heyward offers an excellent description of loving relationship when she says:

To say I love you is to say that you are not mine, but rather your own.

To love you is to advocate your rights, your space, your self, and to struggle with you, rather than against you, in your learning to claim your power in the world. To love you is to make love to you, and with you, whether in an exchange of glances heavy with existence, in the passing of a peace we mean, in our common work or play, in our struggle for social justice, or in the ecstasy and tenderness of intimate embrace which we believe is just and right for us—and for others in the world.

To love you is to be pushed by a power/god both terrifying and comforting, to touch and be touched by you. To love you is to sing with you, cry with you, pray with you, and act with you to re-create the world.

When it comes down to it, there is no difference in the love experienced by gay and lesbian couples and heterosexual couples. Love is love is love.

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The bill is a cause for celebration. Soon, when it finally passes, we will be able to celebrate the love and commitment of all Canadian couples. The circle of love, of responsibility, of commitment, of marriage will be wider.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member of the NDP for his most interesting and moving speech. I congratulate him on his great courage.

I would also like to ask him a question, one that keeps cropping up. Certain groups that are not necessarily familiar with the bill in its entirety fear that churches will be forced to marry same sex couples. Can the hon. member explain the Supreme Court's position on this?

• (1730)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay: Madam Speaker, as this debate has gone on, I have seen very few people in the corner of those who support gay and lesbian marriage who have had any concern, or any qualm or any intention of challenging a church's right to its own decision making process, its own beliefs and its own theology around the question of gay and lesbian marriage. That is just not an issue in those quarters.

The bill goes out of its way to be very clear that religious freedom is protected in Canada. This is something that we on this side of the House, and I know the member's party does as well, strongly support.

There is no intent here to force religious organizations of any kind to perform a service for gay and lesbian couples against their will, their belief and their theology. That has been very clear. It has been a fundamental part of the debate. It has been a fundamental part of what gay and lesbian people have been saying about the legislation. I just do not think there is any question about it, and the bill takes pains to make that very clear.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from the NDP for an eloquent speech.

I would like to state for the record that the issue is not that we do not recognize the loving relationship between a number of members of our society. That is not the issue.

I have spoken to a number of people on both sides of the House who have differing opinions with respect to this and it comes down to the word marriage. The rights of those who have come to know this word to mean one thing have to be protected. I can only hope that in time a word will come to mean as much to same sex couples as the word marriage has come to mean to heterosexual couples.

Unless it has been changed recently, the NDP website expresses that it supports all forms of marriage. Rather than choose the word both forms of marriage, it decidedly chose the words all forms. Could the member define for the House why the NDP chose the word all rather than both?

Mr. Bill Siksay: Madam Speaker, as far as I am concerned there is only one form of marriage in Canada and that is the commitment that we have been talking about here this afternoon. Gay and lesbian people do not have a different notion of marriage. They do not have

a different understanding of marriage. They do not have a different ideal around marriage. Marriage is marriage is marriage.

The people who challenged the courts to be included in marriage did so because they believe in that institution and share its values. They support the tradition of marriage. There is no differing idea of marriage. We only need one institution of marriage in this country. Gay and lesbian people, who are seeking to be included in that, support that institution fully and unequivocally.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Madam Speaker, I spent 32 years in the field of education, mostly at the secondary and junior high school level. During those years I had some experience dealing with mandated programs that came into play with regard to sex education and various things. This became quite an issue with a number of parents who felt that certain subjects should be left in the home, in the church, and not in the educational system. It was not long before those things were pretty well mandated across the country and have since become an intricate part of the educational system, much to the dismay of many.

As a consequence of that, private schools began cropping up because they did not want the mandated programs offered by the public system. I know for certain that lineups to get into private schools have grown since the introduction of this legislation because of the fear of what may happen in the public system as a result of the bill.

I wonder if the member could tell me what he anticipates might happen to the educational system at the secondary or junior high level, or even at the earlier levels if Bill C-38 is passed.

• (1735)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Madam Speaker, I hope every educational institution in this country, whether private or public, has a discussion about this legislation. I hope they have discussions about marriage and the meaning of marriage. I hope they have discussions about the place of gay and lesbian people in our society. I hope they have discussions about the kind of loving commitments Canadians make to each other, whether they are heterosexual or gay or lesbian. That would be a fine thing for this country. I have no fear of those kind of discussions.

The member raised the situation of people perhaps sending their children to a school with a more controlled curriculum or where some issues might not come up as often. I grew up in a school system that did not talk about issues of sexuality very well. As a young gay man I was very isolated. I hope all our institutions will take pains to ensure that young gay and lesbian people are heard. I hope they are not made invisible. I hope they are protected from bigotry and prejudice. I hope they are supported through their years of discovering their sexuality whether that is in a public school, a private school or whatever.

Whatever we can do to foster that kind of discussion and that kind of acceptance will be a good thing.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, first, I would like to thank the hon. member for his honesty and candour in openly admitting during a debate in this House that he is gay. I would like to ask him a question on family values. I am convinced that if the hon. member can rise in this House today, it is because he was born of a family, of a father and a mother.

Will society evolve? Earlier, we talked about centuries. In 100 years, will we have to vote in this House to allow a mother to marry her son, a father to marry his daughter, a daughter to marry her brother?

I would like the hon. member to reflect on this and to tell us how, in the case of a married gay couple, he thinks family values can develop.

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay: Madam Speaker, anyone who has had the experience of getting to know a gay or lesbian couple or gay or lesbian family would know the obvious answer to that question.

The values that are expressed in our relationships are no different than the values expressed in the relationships of heterosexual couples. The values that our children learn in our families are no different than the values that the children learn in the families headed by heterosexual couples. Anyone who has had any experience of that will understand that is true.

The question in some ways is unfortunate because it denies the reality of the commitments that we make to each other, of the love that we express, and of the care we have for our children and their upbringing.

I was raised in a family with heterosexual parents and I learned values from my parents and from their parents, my grandparents. Those are the values that I take forward into my life as an adult. Those are the values that I take into my relationship with my partner. I think it is very consistent. The couples who are bringing forward the question of marriage are people who strongly share the values of marriage as they have been raised with it in this society.

This is not a challenge to the meaning of marriage, to the values of marriage, to the obligations of marriage, or to the responsibilities of marriage. In this society where, in many ways, marriage is under threat from marriage breakdown and that kind of thing and not because it is gay and lesbian people whose marriages are breaking down. These are people who are willing to champion that institution and say that it is an institution that still has value, promise and possibility. They are the ones who are taking it into the future and who are strengthening marriage as we speak today.

● (1740)

[English]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**CITIZENSHIP ACT**

The House resumed from February 10 consideration of the motion that Bill S-2, an act to amend the Citizenship Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Pursuant to an order made earlier the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill S-2 under private members' business.

Call in the members.

● (1805)

And the bells having rung:

Mr. Derek Lee: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I realize you are dutifully following the procedure for a roll call vote, but I look around the House and sense that this measure might be adopted on division without a roll call vote. I wonder if you would seek the view of the House as to whether or not this measure could be adopted unanimously.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Does the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River have the unanimous consent of the House to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 170

That, in the opinion of the House, the government, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should develop a national strategy on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias to ensure a nationally coordinated and comprehensive approach to these health issues.

She said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to this private member's motion. The motion calls upon the federal government to initiate consultations with the provinces and territories to develop a national strategy on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

The central purpose is to put in place a coordinated comprehensive approach by providing an opportunity for shared learning, the development of best practice models of care across jurisdictional boundaries, and the adoption of a strategic and cost effective response to Alzheimer's disease.

Private Members' Business

Recently the National Advisory Council on Aging released a position paper on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The report presents a strong and undeniable case for Alzheimer's disease as a national health priority for Canadians. It indicates that a national strategy is needed, is feasible, and the need for leadership on a national level is recommended.

Some of the key recommendations include research, information, education, access and equity, quality, integration, a continuum of care, and workforce development and training. Similarly we already have models of nationally integrated and coordinated strategies to address other chronic diseases like diabetes, stroke and cancer. Our demographics clearly show that there is a looming need for collective action on Alzheimer's disease now.

As a daughter whose father passed away from Alzheimer's disease, I have experienced the full range of consequences resulting from this devastating disease. There are no adequate words to describe what it is like to stand by and watch the disintegration of a once thriving contributing individual, a loved one, literally slip away day by day.

Imagine someone like my dad, Vic, who fought for Canada in World War II, working all his life, supporting his family, putting his kids through school and then getting to retirement age, a time when he should be enjoying his spouse and grandchildren, and instead a descent into the darkness of cognitive impairment begins. A person's spouse, family and caregivers watch this relentless disease take hold as death in slow motion begins.

Alzheimer's disease is a progressive, irreversible, degenerative disease of the brain. In essence, it attacks and destroys brain cells, ravaging the mind, often brilliant minds, by impairing one's memory, insight and judgment. In its wake is left a monumental far-reaching effect on families across our country. Over 70% of informal caregivers are women, most often wives, 24%, or adult daughters, 29%. Current estimates indicate that one Alzheimer's patient affects a minimum of 10 to 12 people, whether it is family, caregivers, neighbours or close friends.

Current statistics indicate that there are 420,600 individuals who suffer presently from Alzheimer's and dementia in Canada. This figure represents approximately 8% of all our seniors. In 2005 there will be an estimated 94,270 new cases of dementia, the majority being Alzheimer's. By 2011 new cases of dementia are expected to reach 111,560 per year, of which 67,680 will be women and 43,880 will be men.

It is estimated that by 2031 approximately 750,000 Canadians are expected to be affected by this dreaded disease. That is three-quarters of a million Canadians. Over the age of 65, people's odds are 1 in 13 to be affected by Alzheimer's.

The statistics on Alzheimer's disease, while significant on their own, can only begin to tell the story of the far-reaching impact of this disease. There are a growing number of organizations, like the Alzheimer Society of Canada and its provincial and community counterparts, working diligently in an effort to meet the needs of patients, families and caregivers. Key stakeholders have formed community partnerships to initiate and implement policies and services to fulfill the needs of patients, their families and their

caregivers. I heartily applaud the work being done today across our country.

I am also acutely aware that as the number of Canadians diagnosed with Alzheimer's increases as a result of our aging population, we must act decisively and strategically to beat this catastrophic illness and to improve our ability to better cope with the impacts while we do so. An increasing number of baby boomers are now finding and will find themselves becoming a part of a caregiver network to parents, relatives and friends with dementia.

● (1810)

Statistics clearly show the correlation in the development of chronic health problems as a significant factor among informal caregivers who are caring for people with dementia. Of all groups researched, spousal caregivers use fewer support services than any other, yet it is precisely those spousal caregivers who are more likely to be giving care to those with Alzheimer's.

Aside from the overwhelming human costs, the financial costs associated with Alzheimer's disease are startling in themselves. Health care, paid and unpaid caregiving, of which there is much, combined are estimated to be \$5.5 billion per year. The social costs to families, caregivers and society at large are enormous, for example, unpaid caregiving, stress, illness, depression and career interruption.

The costs to our society are incalculable. There is no doubt that these costs will rise exponentially if current projections remain unchanged and appropriate steps are not taken now. In fact, some analysts believe that over the next 25 years, Alzheimer's disease combined with other forms of cognitive impairment will rise to have the highest economic, social and health cost burden of all diseases in Canada.

The implications are clearly something that cannot be ignored. This is a sleeping giant. The need to enhance, coordinate and expedite the needed support services and research cannot be overstated.

Our knowledge of Alzheimer's is increasing. However, more definitive research is necessary now. Many researchers feel that the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and related dementia may be reduced or delayed by certain preventative factors. We are beginning to understand there are things that we can do which may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease. This must be pursued vigorously. In addition, if research can develop the means of diagnosing people with Alzheimer's disease earlier, with more precision prior to significant brain damage, improved intervention would be able to actually halt the progression of the disease, avoiding it in its most severe forms.

As mild cognitive impairment is a risk factor for Alzheimer's disease, it is now an important and promising area of dementia research. In biomedical and psychosocial research, Canada has made considerable contributions to Alzheimer's disease. However, we do lag behind our American and European counterparts in developing a coordinated national research program.

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Scientists have made great advances in better understanding Alzheimer's disease in the last 20 years, but this success has not always translated into the politics of health policy. It is now clear that early intervention with the appropriate services and treatment can delay the onset of this disease. While the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, which includes the Institute of Aging, has been a very important component of health research in Canada, very simply put, the incidence of Alzheimer's disease and its impact is growing at a faster rate than increases in research.

In several key areas related to diagnosis, treatment, care and possible cure of Alzheimer's, we must do a lot better, and we can. Increased funding is only part of the answer in this race against time. Although we find many individual situations where quality care exists, there are many more where this is not the case. There is no doubt they would benefit significantly from a comprehensive coordinated approach of sharing best practices. There is no doubt.

The aim of a national strategy would be to enhance the quality of life for people living with Alzheimer's, their families and caregivers, and where possible, prevent or delay the onset of this dreaded disease. While much of the implementation would occur at the provincial, territorial, regional and community levels, the federal government can and must play a key role, both in terms of leadership and funding.

There are countless Canadians taking care of loved ones with Alzheimer's disease. Surprisingly, only one in four people caring for a person with dementia receives formal home care services to assist them in caring for their family member, often after five years. This is a result of many factors, including inconsistent funding, lack of care and support services across the country, and a lack of knowledge often that there are services available. A national Alzheimer's strategy would unquestionably provide the much needed focus to address serious issues, each of which holds tremendous potential to improve the quality of life of Canadians with Alzheimer's disease and their families.

This bold essential step of establishing a national strategy has the potential to change lives now and in the future.

In a 2002 Ipsos-Reid poll, Canadians showed they are highly aware of Alzheimer's, with almost 90% indicating they are equally and especially concerned about the cost to our health care system now and in the future as our population ages. The same percentage also felt that more money should be spent on Alzheimer's research. Over 52% of Canadians know someone with Alzheimer's disease. In fact, almost 25% of Canadians have someone with Alzheimer's in their families.

• (1815)

The fact is Canadians expect action by their governments regarding Alzheimer's disease. I believe we have an absolute obligation to our parents, ourselves and the next generation to do everything possible to confront this cruel killer at every turn, to prevent it, delay it, and finally stop it in its tracks. We have a responsibility also to make this journey as dignified as possible for those who suffer from it and those around them.

This formidable enemy has claimed far too many victims in the cruelest way possible and it warrants an equally fierce national

comprehensive plan of action, a collective action. We must take the necessary steps now to put in place a system that will respond to the unprecedented challenges that await us surely in the coming years.

The establishment of a national strategy on Alzheimer's disease would signal an important recognition of the impact that this disease has on all aspects of our health care system, our communities and our society. It should take a long term approach, build momentum, build on our current successes, with the aim of developing and adding capacity so that we can move to close the gaps that currently exist.

As I mentioned earlier, the establishment of a national strategy on diabetes several years earlier is a perfect case in point that developing a national action plan can become and will become a catalyst in moving forward. Incidents of diabetes have become more and more prevalent in our society, in fact reaching epidemic proportions. In establishing the national diabetes strategy there was a concentrated collaborated effort which elevated the level of awareness, research and programs available and being developed to combat this rapidly escalating disease.

In developing a national strategy on Alzheimer's disease, I believe this proactive step would be instrumental in leveraging existing as well as new resources from all partners so that concrete steps can be taken to tackle this disease effectively. This historic commitment would certainly go a long way in identifying and extracting the maximum benefit possible from the resources we are already committing and would lay the groundwork for the years ahead which could be very difficult.

Working in conjunction with the provinces and territories, we have made great strides on numerous fronts, like our 10 year health accord, moving forward with the national home care plan, and the development of our healthy living strategy to manage and improve our health both now and in the future. Although all these investments are very valuable pieces in the puzzle in the diagnosis and treatment of, and hopefully an ultimate cure for Alzheimer's, there is still a critical need for an all-encompassing strategic plan for the future.

Alzheimer's disease and related dementias are complex problems that cannot be undertaken by one government or one sector of society. This disease does not acknowledge jurisdictional boundaries. In committing to a national strategy on Alzheimer's disease with our other key partners we would be able to weave together the threads of policy initiatives, programs and services across our country to focus on the prevention, treatment and cure of this disease.

To all my colleagues, I ask that they join me today in recommending the development of a national strategy on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias to prevent the worst effects of this disease in the years ahead. We are poised for a breakthrough. Let us not drop the ball now. It is within our reach.

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•(1820)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the member for all the fine work that has been done by her on this file and the obvious compassion she has for the people who are afflicted with this disease, not only the patients, but also the families, the communities and everyone concerned. It is important that we work toward such a strategy.

I know the member has firsthand knowledge of the effects of such a disease on families and friends. I know she is in contact with the Alzheimer's society. She would be aware of the research. The research side is important.

Perhaps she could enlighten the House as to what she would see as the priorities for such a strategy that would help immediately the families, as well as those individuals who may become afflicted with this disease in the future.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Madam Speaker, I think the key is to pull together the threads, all the expertise that currently exists across the country in a way that we help to provide a focus. Once we provide the focus, services will improve and issues of money can be dealt with at that time, once it is known what the focus is. We cannot actually know what true funding we need to allocate if we do not first create that focus and true understanding of what currently exists.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I ask the member for Thornhill, why is it necessary to develop a national strategy and how will the provincial and territorial counterparts assist in it? I know the member has made an effort. She talked about providing a focus, but could the member elaborate on the importance of a national strategy versus what is happening now?

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Madam Speaker, I think the issue I raised about a looming, aging population, mandates us to go forward collectively on this issue. I believe we all have a role to play here. I believe there should be leadership from the national level. We already have a lot of positive initiatives taking place, very innovative ones in many ways.

I believe it is only through this collaborative effort that we will see this breakthrough. The reality is that we are very close to a breakthrough. We have already seen that we can delay the onset. This is very unusual and it is due to a lot of our research.

We have an opportunity for a breakthrough, rather than a crisis. When we know we can take advantage of this potential, we cannot afford to relegate it to the legacy of lost opportunities.

•(1825)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of this initiative. I would like to commend the member for Thornhill for the work she has done and the comments that have been made just now.

I think it is relevant to the debate to start with a comment on the findings of the National Advisory Council on Aging. It states:

Alzheimer Disease, and other forms of cognitive impairment, will have the highest economic, social and health cost burden of all diseases in Canada over the next 25 years.

This is a matter that is of great concern to all Canadians, and I will touch on this later in my speech. All of our lives have been touched by this particular disease or we know someone who has been touched by this disease.

The question of whether or not we develop a national strategy to tackle this horrible ailment is what role the federal government will play. I understand there are questions of jurisdiction and that many people believe this is a provincial matter and the federal government should not intervene. However I do think there are many ways that the federal government can intervene.

Would the hon. member specifically indicate some of the areas nationally that would be touched upon and dealt with by the federal government?

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Madam Speaker, I think our role, first and foremost, will be to show that leadership and to liaise with the provinces, territories and regions.

We are already actively engaged, as everyone knows, with the health accord. We are working on a national home care strategy as well. All the pieces are in place and the stage is set. The last piece is for us, as the federal government, to take the lead in sending that message to everyone working in the field, pulling it together in a consolidated way. I have total confidence that this will lead to an improved quality of life, a great opportunity for a cure and, if not a cure, at least a much better and more reasonable management of this disease.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Health and critic for the family and caregivers, I want to express my opinion on this motion.

I would like to begin by reminding the House that January is Alzheimer Awareness Month, as my hon. colleague surely already knows.

In Canada, 280,000 people over 65 years old are affected by Alzheimer disease. That is, one person in 20. It is predicted that, by 2031, more than 750,000 people will have Alzheimer disease or related dementias.

In addition, it is a degenerative disease that causes lesions in the brain. The brain cells shrink or disappear and are replaced by irregular spots called plaques. This disease causes a gradual and irreversible degeneration of cognitive functions such as memory, orientation, judgment, language, and the ability to learn new things. The most terrible aspect of this disease is that one becomes the parent of the person, no longer their child, and worse, unable to express love for that person, who no longer understands.

Every year, \$5.5 billion is spent in Canada on persons with Alzheimer disease and related dementias. The annual social cost of caring for an individual varies from \$9,000 for a person with the mild form of the disease to \$37,000 for a person with the severe form. Those are annual figures.

There is talk here of creating a national strategy on Alzheimer disease. Here is another federal attempt at encroaching on provincial jurisdictions, by acting directly in a field related to health. The Liberal government must understand that health is a provincial matter and that, at present, Quebec and the other provinces have considerable expertise in the field and have succeeded in developing unique forms of care.

A national policy is not what residential care centres need; they need funds to apply the strategy that experts in the field have already developed. The same is true for caregivers, who ought to receive more recognition for their work, and who ought to receive a tax credit, for example, which would compensate them for their great devotion. The only way to achieve this is to return money for health to Quebec and the provinces in order to enable them to provide the best possible care for people suffering from this terrible disease.

To come back to caregivers, 50% of people suffering from dementia live at home and not at a home care facility; 97% of these people receive help from a caregiver—often the caregivers are women—while 30% of caregivers have a full-time job. I should also mention that 50% of these caregivers are over 60 and 36% are over 70. When I talk about caregivers over 70, I mean people who have been caring for a person with the illness for at least five years.

Spouse caregivers are less likely to have back-up support than others and yet are more likely to be caring for a person with dementia. Only 3.4 per cent of caregivers use the respite care designed to give the caregiver a break for a few hours.

I want to explain a little more about the various stages of the disease to illustrate how devastating it is and what it demands of the caregiver.

At the first stage there is no cognitive decline. The person receives the diagnosis but experiences no problems in daily living.

At the second stage there is very mild cognitive decline. The person starts to forget names and locations of objects. In some cases, they may have trouble finding words.

At the third stage there is mild cognitive decline. The person has difficulty travelling to new locations and handling problems at work.

At the fourth stage there is moderate cognitive decline. The person has difficulty with complex tasks such as finances, shopping, planning dinner.

At the fifth stage moderately severe cognitive decline sets in. The person needs help to choose clothing and needs prompting to bathe.

• (1830)

This is the stage at which major aggression develops, because the individual is aware of his or her cognitive losses and frustrated at needing someone else's help to accomplish these tasks.

By the sixth stage, the individual needs constant supervision, because more advanced cognitive problems are developing. He or she needs help in dressing and bathing, and has problems getting to the toilet. Incontinence may start developing.

Finally, in the seventh stage, when cognitive problems are now advanced, the individual is reduced to a limited vocabulary or to

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one-word answers, loses the ability to walk and to sit, along with the ability to smile. There is a total loss of autonomy.

Not surprisingly, caregivers develop chronic health problems. Depression is almost twice as frequent in caregivers of Alzheimer's patients as it is in other caregivers.

The caregivers are often elderly and have neither the ability or the means to look after a relative in stages five to seven of the disease. This is the point at which most start thinking about finding a placement for the individual.

Fortunately, Quebec has developed some advanced services tailored to these specific needs. The long term care hospitals, for instance, have special care units, and there are special residences such as Carpe Diem in Trois-Rivières.

The special care unit concept is designed especially for residents with Alzheimer's to help them adapt and retain their physical, psychological and social integrity as long as possible, by including them in daily living activities, with the amount of support appropriate to their stage of disease. The people in these units are treated with respect and dignity, moreover.

Then there are the community organizations specializing in services to patients and families. In Laval, for instance, we have the Alzheimer's Society, under the enlightened leadership of Mariette Chalifoux, which has developed a broad range of services for raising public awareness and providing information and training.

There is also the Baluchon Alzheimer respite service, which enables caregivers to take a break with peace of mind for a week or two, without having to move their relative to a different environment. A live-in caregiver comes to the home of the person and takes that opportunity to perform an assessment using various intervention strategies. In addition, we must not forget the significant contribution of the staff at Laval's Coopérative de soutien à domicile, who, through the technical support and the housekeeping, groceries, and laundry services they provide, support the caregiver, freeing up more time to spend with the person being cared for.

As hon. members can see, we already have a service strategy for Alzheimer's in Quebec. What would help, though, would be new money, because facilities like Carpe Diem and respite services are terribly short of money and are often underfunded because of the growing costs of health care.

A national policy whereby the same standards would be applied to the care of patients from coast to coast is not what we need; what we need is funding transfers to allow the provinces to implement their own solutions and, in particular, to enable them to provide personalized care, as required by the circumstances.

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In this context, the Bloc Québécois is demanding that the Prime Minister's government correct the fiscal imbalance that is limiting the ability of the governments in Quebec and the provinces to invest more in residential care and caregiver services for people with Alzheimer's.

Tax fields have to be divided more equitably between Ottawa and Quebec and the provinces. This would enable the governments of Quebec and the provinces to diversify their own source revenues, fully assume their exclusive responsibility over health care and ensure that all Canadians receive the services they need.

Hon. members have no doubt gathered that we denounce the numerous intrusions in health care by the federal government. Therefore, while we believe that the federal government should make an extra effort in the areas of health care and medical research, we demand that additional approved funding be given to the governments of Quebec and the provinces with absolutely no strings attached.

That is why the Bloc Québécois is totally opposed to a national policy on Alzheimer's, and I encourage all my hon. colleagues to vote against this motion.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this worthy motion in front of the House.

First, I would like to applaud the member for Thornhill for bringing the issue to the fore and, more important, for recognizing the need for the federal government to develop a national strategy on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Alzheimer's disease typically affects older Canadians, attacking and destroying brain cells. This disease ravages the mind. As a result, it impairs memory, insight and judgment.

Current statistics indicate that there are over 420,000 Canadians who suffer from Alzheimer's. That is nearly one out of every 10 seniors. In my home province of Saskatchewan, approximately 18,000 residents are currently suffering from Alzheimer's or a related dementia. Furthermore, as our population ages, these numbers will likely triple in upcoming decades. The cost of this debilitating disease to society has been and will continue to be immeasurable.

However, the cost is not only a monetary one. Alzheimer's disease brings with it a much greater emotional cost. As anyone who has witnessed the effects of Alzheimer's disease on a loved one will say, there are few afflictions which cause such heartbreak. According to recent studies, the effects of one individual with Alzheimer's will reverberate on the lives of 10 to 12 family members or friends.

The impact that Alzheimer's disease has on the family of the individual diagnosed is, in a word, devastating, for not only does it contribute to a slew of physical ailments, it takes away the most vital mental capacities of a loved one: their judgment and their memory.

The slow pace at which Alzheimer's begins to take over an individual is especially heartbreaking. The life expectancy for those with Alzheimer's is typically 8 to 10 years after the first symptoms have been detected. Patients usually do not die from the disease itself but rather from secondary infections like pneumonia that take over as

the body's organs decline. Immediately before death, patients are mute, bedridden and exhausted.

Watching one's own mother or father, husband or wife slowly slip away into the darkness takes an immense emotional toll on loved ones. It alters the normality of everyday life so that nothing seems normal again.

As there are so many affected by this disease, I would like to address the impact that Alzheimer's has on the everyday lives of those who serve as primary caregivers. These caregivers are typically family members: daughters, sons, husbands, wives, brothers or sisters, people with a deep personal connection with the individual affected by Alzheimer's, people who have the ability to read their every slight sign or movement. These people do not apply for the job of caregiver. There is no financial reward. This is truly a labour of love.

The demands on them are great. The caregiver's role constantly changes. They are at various times a teacher, a nurse, a maid, a cook, a cleaner and a chauffeur. The everyday routine of life we take for granted is interrupted. For instance, late at night when most of us are fast asleep, caregivers are tending to a loved one who may be waking up constantly, confused and scared, needing a steady reassurance to calm their fears.

The caregiver's life is engrossed in servicing the needs of the individual. Little time remains for one's own personal life, leisure, activities or holidays. To cope with these challenges requires one to push one's inner physical, mental and spiritual strength to the limit.

Over time, the caregiver is steadily robbed by Alzheimer's disease of the one thing they want from their loved one: recognition. As the disease erodes the mental capabilities of the patient, the caregiver is often given a blank stare of bewilderment from a person they have known and loved for most of their lives, such as a wife looking at her husband of 50 years knowing that he does not even know her name anymore.

• (1840)

Even more distressing for the caregivers is the realization that for all their efforts the end result is predetermined. The father, mother, husband or wife they have spent a lifetime with will become increasingly distant, a shell of their former selves. Few things in life are conceivably as heartbreaking as such a painful realization, yet thousands of Canadians are caring for loved ones with Alzheimer's, enduring much sacrifice and emotional strain.

Understanding the experience of those affected by the disease and their caregivers is but one step. It is imperative to examine and to build upon existing initiatives throughout the country in order to have a national strategy for Alzheimer's. This strategy should ensure that sufficient funding and other measures are available at provincial and regional levels.

This national strategy must encompass a variety of issues relating to Alzheimer's. For instance, there are many financial implications for someone who assumes the role of caregiver. They may have to give up employment while still having to pay a mortgage and support their family. A national strategy should examine programs at the federal level to see if they could be improved to meet the unique requirements of caregivers.

Those suffering from this disease, their caregivers, doctors and other health care professionals must be at the forefront of the consultation process in developing a comprehensive strategy to combat Alzheimer's disease.

Ideally the consultation process should identify areas Canadians can work on to ensure that the best possible care and support are available for those dealing with this disease. Working together in partnership with all relevant stakeholders, an effective response could be developed.

Furthermore, as the groundwork is laid for a national strategy, we must look at ways in which the federal government can work with the provinces and territories in a variety of areas like support for caregivers, increasing public awareness and scientific research.

Similar consultation processes are already beginning on a smaller, more local level. Communities are getting together to share ideas and strategies to assist those with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. For instance, in the next few months, the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan will be conducting retreats designed to achieve such goals. These are initiatives that should be commended and encouraged under any program.

It is time for Canada to recognize the growing need to address this serious disease and develop a national strategy to combat Alzheimer's. I urge all members of the House to support the motion.

•(1845)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a real honour for me to rise tonight and speak on this motion.

I would have thought that there were certain issues in this House beyond the cynical take the money and run politics of the separatists, but obviously not. I do believe that this is an issue that rises above party politics. It rises above the provincial bickering that we see time and time again, because we are speaking about an issue that we need a national strategy for. I do not think it is a strategy that we are talking about putting a name to simply to say "we support this". We need a comprehensive strategy to deal with Alzheimer's. It has to bring together the provinces. It has to bring together the national government.

It strikes us on so many fundamental levels. For example, a national strategy must look at pharmacare. It must look at the access to drugs, especially for low income people.

It has to look at accessibility to home care and the lack of home care we see in communities where old people are left without anyone to come in and see them.

We have to talk about tax credits. We have to talk about the financial impacts on families, which they are suffering day after day. Tax credits are part of that strategy.

We also have to talk about research. Research is something that we do need on a national level, because the impacts of this disease and the cause of this disease are what we have to look at.

I would like to say that for my own part in my riding of Timmins—James Bay I have been very active, as has my provincial counterpart, with the elder abuse awareness program in the Cochrane

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district, because we know that the devastating emotional impact Alzheimer's has on families is intricately tied to elder abuse.

In our region we brought together numerous stakeholders. I think it is a good example of where we can go in terms of who has to be brought into this. We are working now with the VCARS organization, community home care, the Red Cross, the Ontario Provincial Police, Timmins Community Policing, and the Golden Manor, which is an old age home in our region.

We have the legal clinics involved now. One of the fundamental aspects of elder abuse is financial abuse because elders are no longer able to look after their own resources. Now we are asking to bring in the banks, because it is a fundamental job of the banks, a fiduciary obligation, I would suggest, to play an important role in protecting the assets of people suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia.

We are trying to coordinate a strategy at our local level with these various groups. My office is very active and involved. I would support in any way I could moves by the government to bring in a national Alzheimer's strategy.

I would like to speak about this from a personal level. I spent my afternoons sitting in a room where the lights were always on, a room that smelled of cleanser and madness and loneliness. I spent those days with my grandfather, who was probably one of the biggest figures in my life, a man who had no formal education but a fantastic intelligence.

My grandfather spent 40 years working in the McIntyre gold mine in Schumacher, Ontario, where they pioneered the principle of forcing men to breathe aluminum dust every single day they went to work as a condition of employment. The aluminum dust was sent into their lungs as a way of coating their lungs; they said it was to protect against silicosis, but we knew that was not true. We knew that the coated lungs did not show up on the x-rays.

Thirty-five thousand miners across Ontario were forced to breathe aluminum dust for a period of 40 years. What are the effects of that? We do not know. I do not know if the damaged syntaxes in my grandfather's mind had anything to do with the aluminum he was forced to breathe, but again, this is where the area of research is so important.

In my short life, I have seen people die. I have been there for many people I have known, for family and friends, but I have never seen a death as lonely as an Alzheimer's death, because with Alzheimer's one lives alone and dies alone. It does not matter how much of the family is there; one is left alone because of the condition of the disease. With my grandfather, the worst was that he never succumbed to the balm of forgetfulness. He was acutely aware every single minute of the day of where he was: he was not where he should be.

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● (1850)

My grandfather would sit in the old folks home and watch people sitting in chairs waiting. He wondered what they were waiting for. They were waiting to die. He used to think I was his cousin, and we were working on the day shift at the gold mine. One day he thought he was sitting in a bus station. He thought we were in Sydney to see the family and we were on our way back to Timmins. I saw him rifling through his pant pockets because he realized he did not have a ticket, nor did he have any money. He was in terror. He lived in terror in his final years and months because he never knew where he should be.

We see the effects of this disease on the family. I saw the effect it had on my grandmother and my mother, who spent so much of her life looking after this man. There was very little support. Fortunately we had a very good hospital where he finally ended up, but it was very difficult for our family to even send him there.

For families who do not have two caregivers at home or who do not have the financial support, the effects of this disease are devastating. We know that as the population ages, it will get worse. We know the change in our families with our 24/7 lives. We know we do not have the community supports that we had before to handle people with dementia.

When we talk about a national strategy on Alzheimer's, we are talking about a need to address a fundamental obligation of our society to protect and respect our elders.

I worked in the first nation communities of northern Quebec. I saw how important the elders were in that society. I see that among the people of the Mushkegowuk Cree where I work now as a member of Parliament. Respect for elders is a fundamental principle of their society and it should be a fundamental principle of ours. No one should be left alone to die of a disease like this, and no family should be left without supports.

Is this simply a matter of giving money to the provinces, then letting them go off and do their thing? I do not think so. We are dealing with a much bigger and broader issue. We need to come together on this. The New Democratic Party supports a national strategy for Alzheimer's. We need to work and bring as many people together as possible to make this work.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the proposed Motion No. 170, a national Alzheimer's strategy. The scope of the proposed motion is indeed broad and it challenges us to address the plight of many Canadian seniors and their families who are affected by Alzheimer's disease.

Globally, about 18 million people currently have dementia. In Canada over 420,000 people over the age of 65 have Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. Within 25 years, there will be almost 600,000 seniors with dementia. Within 30 years this number will rise to reach three-quarters of a million people.

Alzheimer's disease is a devastating condition that involves more than the clinical loss of memory. It causes the deterioration of cherished bonds with families and loved ones and the victim's sense of unique personal history and identity.

In the words of one senior who learned she was in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease just as she was beginning to enjoy her recent retirement, "It's like having cancer of the mind".

There is no known cause or cure for Alzheimer's disease, however, there are treatments to alleviate some of the symptoms and to delay progression of the disease, as was mentioned by the member for Thornhill. Beyond the numbers, we have to consider the human suffering. The extra years that Canadian seniors are now living are compromised by the growing likelihood of developing Alzheimer's disease. Indeed over one senior in every three over age 85 is afflicted by dementia. The consequences of this incurable disease for families or persons with dementia can be devastating physically, emotionally and financially.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Thornhill should be congratulated on raising this issue for debate in the House of Commons. The purpose behind Motion No. 170 is laudable and the questions it raises deserve special attention.

Perhaps the introduction of Motion No. 170 was speeded up somewhat by the recommendations made to the Minister of Health by the National Advisory Council on Aging and endorsed by the Alzheimer Society of Canada.

The council is a group of independent, very credible citizens who have been advising the government for over 20 years on all matters related to the aging of the Canadian population and the quality of life of seniors. The council's role is to encourage reflection and discussion so that Canada adapts quickly and appropriately to the increased number of seniors in our society.

The council has presented 30 recommendations concerning Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. These recommendations cover a wide range of fields, including research, prevention, treatment and support. Alzheimer's disease and related dementias create complex problems that have an impact on many sectors of society.

● (1855)

[*English*]

The Minister of Health welcomes the advice of the National Advisory Council on Aging, and is studying these recommendations carefully as he considers all the council's advice in the area of health. Issues associated with an aging population are complex, with many ramifications across sectors and government. Complex problems call for carefully considered solutions.

Our current knowledge about Alzheimer's disease in Canada is the result of forward looking investments in health research, which the Government of Canada has already made.

In the past 15 years or so much has been learned about the prevalence and incidence of dementia, and factors that increase risk or protect people from the disease, as well as underlying biological mechanisms. We have learned more about the care and support for persons with dementia and the challenges faced by families who care for seniors with Alzheimer's disease.

Thanks to the intensive research across Canada, we can detect dementia earlier than before and we can sometimes delay the progression of the disease to preserve a better quality of life for seniors with the disease and their families. We are now more aware of some ways to reduce the risk of developing dementia. This research on dementia is vital, and the government continues to support it through funding by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Throughout the country, people with dementia in their families rely on local chapters of the Alzheimer's Society of Canada for education, advice, support and care. We applaud the ongoing work of the over 150 national, provincial and local Alzheimer's associations or organizations in Canada.

Thanks to the Alzheimer's Society of Canada, advances in Alzheimer's research are shared and promoted, and new programs and services are developed for people with the disease. The society provides effective strategies and techniques for family members and professional caregivers supporting persons with dementia. One of the most important functions of the society is to support people affected by the disease and to communicate to Canadians the reality of living with Alzheimer's disease.

[Translation]

Health Canada has long supported the Alzheimer Society, by granting it transitional funds, funding its community projects that assist seniors and caregivers, and supporting its annual national conference.

In each province and territory, governments, health professionals and volunteers are creating and implementing initiatives to care for individuals with Alzheimer's or related dementias. The aim of these numerous initiatives is to educate the public and professionals, improve diagnosis, care and treatment, and implement community programs and services.

Actions are now being taken at the local level to meet the needs of people suffering from dementia and their families. Instead of making current funding do double duty, the Government of Canada is making a substantial contribution to the provinces, to help them provide health care services that meets the needs of seniors and their families. Numerous efforts are being deployed throughout Canada to adapt health care to local needs and ensure that such care is sustainable.

The provinces and territories are resolute in their efforts, with the assistance of the Government of Canada, to provide Canadians with quality health care.

● (1900)

[English]

Accordingly, primary health care reform is underway in all jurisdictions to provide timely access to family and community care.

Seniors with intellectual impairments need to be assessed and cared for by qualified health professionals, including generalist and specialist physicians, nurses and pharmacists. To ensure an adequate supply and appropriate mix of health care professionals, all jurisdictions are continuing or accelerating their work on health

Private Members' Business

human resource initiatives. These include plans to train, recruit and retain health professionals.

Drug therapies constitute the best treatment for Alzheimer's disease at the present time. Thus, persons with dementia are well served by the development of a national pharmaceuticals strategy that is taking place under the direction of federal, provincial and territorial ministers of health.

Of particular benefit to persons with dementia who depend on drug therapies, the strategy will include the following actions: first, establish a common drug formulary for participating jurisdictions; second, improve the drug approval process to accelerate access to breakthrough drugs; third, create purchase strategies to obtain the best prices for Canadians for drugs; and fourth, enhance action to influence the prescribing behaviour of physicians so that the right drug is used at the right time for the right problem.

The Government of Canada, in partnership with other governments, is renewing and strengthening health care so that it responds appropriately to the needs of a growing population of seniors, including seniors with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. The Minister of Health is committed to the present course of continued investments and partnerships that support the health of seniors.

[Translation]

The Government of Canada is aware of the enormous impact on family members responsible for providing care to seniors suffering from Alzheimer's or any other infirmity. Most families accept this task with love, but it is physically and emotionally draining.

Health problems, feelings of social isolation and depression are shared by all those who care for a senior suffering from dementia or a disabling disease. Yet, families provide at least 80% of care to dependent seniors.

Given this growing problem, the Government of Canada is introducing proactive measures. It has created the portfolio of Minister of State for Families and Caregivers, which will work in collaboration with the Department of Social Development.

[English]

On behalf of the minister, I want to congratulate the member for Thornhill for her initiative, and I thank the members of all parties for their speeches in support.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (Rural Development), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of my colleague, the member for Thornhill, in terms of the motion to develop a national strategy on Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. I also want to congratulate the member for pushing the issue in the House. We can see by some of the debate tonight that there is very strong support for pushing ahead and calling on the Minister of Health and the cabinet to move forward with a national strategy on Alzheimer's.

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As mentioned by the member for Thornhill earlier, a report released in 2004 by the National Advisory Council on Aging called for the development of such a strategy involving not only the provinces but all stakeholders involved in addressing this serious issue.

The report put forward some 28 recommendations and a couple of key recommendations relate to my own province of Prince Edward Island. I want to go to that report for a moment because this is one of the key recommendations in the report.

The report recommended that the federal government ensure that the catastrophic drug coverage plan include coverage of people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. According to the report, P.E.I. is one of four provinces where "Medications approved by Health Canada to treat Alzheimer's disease are not available". The other provinces are British Columbia, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

It is essential that, as advances are made in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and effective medications are approved by the federal government, all provinces make these medications available through their drug benefit plans. We have experienced that before in my province of Prince Edward Island with other drugs that are covered by other provinces. It really puts the citizens in that province at an even worse disadvantage.

It further recommended that the federal government collaborate with provincial and territorial governments through the common drug review to make approved medications for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias accessible to all Canadians in all provinces by ensuring these drugs are part of provincial drug formularies and that the criteria to assess them are appropriate and consistent, meaning from hospitals, long term care institutions and home care, et cetera. That is a strong recommendation that leadership in my own province needs to take into consideration.

The other recommendation, on a more positive note as it relates to Prince Edward Island, is that the federal and provincial governments work to establish a common national definition of a set of home care services and that those services be fully insured under the Canada Health Act.

One of the areas where we are making progress in Prince Edward Island on Alzheimer's is with the Alzheimer's Society of Prince Edward Island. It is a leader, not only nationally but internationally, in the area of elder care medication. This is a pioneering and innovative program designed in Prince Edward Island and provided to families with Alzheimer's victims free of charge which, through the assistance of a mediator for the family, assists families through the difficult experience of caring for a member of the family suffering from Alzheimer's. This is the kind of initiative that we believe should be incorporated within a national strategy.

I congratulate the Alzheimer's Society of Prince Edward Island for that move because it is an appropriate move. As was mentioned by numerous speakers here tonight, the difficulty with Alzheimer's disease is not only for the individual with the disease, but the stress and the effects on the family as well.

●(1905)

To conclude, the member for Thornhill spoke of her personal experience when the disease hit close to home. Others have spoken about that here tonight as well. I am fully supportive of the endeavour and encourage all members to support the member in developing and pushing for this national strategy.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

HEALTH

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Madam Speaker, on Monday of this week I raised the issue of hepatitis C compensation. The response from the government dealt with on-line pharmacies and of course there is no connection. It again suggests the lackadaisical attitude the government has toward this very serious issue that is vital to thousands of Canadians.

My office receives calls and letters every day from victims of tainted blood with very sad stories. Their lives have been ruined by hepatitis C.

It is incomprehensible to me that a government elected by Canadians could turn its back on them when they need the help of government most. The government has blatantly discriminated against Canadians who pay taxes, have families and are contributors to our society.

The government has completely dropped the ball on hepatitis C all for political gamesmanship. It overestimated the number of victims and put a large sum of money into a fund which pays more in administrative work than it does to the victims the fund was set up to help. The government has utterly turned its back on the people whose lives it should have protected, but it has destroyed their lives instead.

There was a vote in the health committee recently. The Conservative Party brought forward a motion to compensate the victims of hepatitis C. I understand that the motion has not had much success in the past, but this time around it did pass in the health committee.

When we brought it to the House to get approval from all the members of all the parties, because it is the right thing to do after all, we had support from all the parties except the Liberal Party. It used procedural tricks and ran out the time, which I expect the hon. member to do today when he answers the questions that I have. He will run out the time without actually answering the questions.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, having said that, it is just another example of how the Liberal government is not willing to deal with the compensation for the people who have contracted hepatitis C through tainted blood.

We have a minister who has at least acknowledged that compensation is appropriate, but then he flip-flops and says it may or may not happen. We are waiting for actuarial reports that will apparently come in June. In the meantime people are dying and people are suffering. He had said that he would speed up the process.

I have the following questions. Will the government compensate all the victims who contracted hepatitis C from tainted blood? Will they be compensated in a timely manner in a manner that does not play with people's lives? Will the government stand up and take responsibility and compensate these people instead of playing political games? These people deserve help and the government should provide it. Do it now. Do the right thing.

● (1910)

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, many points have been raised by the member in this valid question.

He alluded to his question earlier this week during late show proceedings. I have only been here for four years, but I understand it is a tradition of the House that if, after question period, a member is unsatisfied with the fullness of an answer given by a minister, he or she can advise the Table of that fact and a question is put forward in late show proceedings at a future date. That occasion for the member opposite came this week.

As I mentioned in the late show proceedings yesterday, I was in Halifax with the Prime Minister making a historic announcement for the good of the people of Nova Scotia and Canada. The member put forward a question that was completely different than the question he had submitted to the Table.

The member for Richmond Hill, who was representing me and is a very good member of Parliament, had been prepared to answer on another point and was distracted. I was disappointed to learn that the member opposite would contact citizens and say it was because that member did not care. The member today remedied that by speaking to the individual and indicated what had happened. The individual understood that very well and I am pleased that he does. The member raised that point, so I will raise it.

To say we do not care about the victims of hepatitis C is completely wrong. The federal government entered into negotiations with the provincial governments, had discussions with the people who had the ailment, and created a trust account, a fund of \$900 million, to assist those people. Outside of that, it worked with the provinces to create another fund for a little over \$500 million for people who fell outside of the negotiated settlement area.

The fund that was created for the people within the settlement time period is managed by experts, as any fund should be. These experts know the market, disburse the funds in accordance with the agreement reached, and are authorized and approved by the courts of three different provinces in the country.

That fund may continue over a 70 year period and according to six levels of payments depending on the ailments and the incapacities of

the people suffering from hepatitis C. Now we have to know whether we have a surplus, and if we do, at what level. That is called an actuarial surplus. That is a surplus of money which we can expect to earn on the market and what we can expect by professional analysis will be the payouts in the future.

Once that is done, in accordance with a motion of the health committee which was supported by all parties, the minister will enter into the proper negotiations with the people involved in that fund to include a wider scope of people for payment, people who fell outside of the compensation area. The minister does that willingly, with a very generous heart.

● (1915)

Mr. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, that was a really sad answer. The only thing sadder is what is happening today with the people who need this compensation.

I hope the experts he is referring to are more qualified than the member who answered the question on Monday night. The question clearly talked about hepatitis C and his response had nothing to do with the issue at hand. That is shameful. He should know that these people deserve compensation. It is indicative of the government being unable to care.

Instead of giving us mumbo-jumbo, will the member tell us when these people can expect compensation? This has not been going on for a month or two. It has been going on for years, almost a decade. Please compensate these people. Do not go on with these administrative mumbo-jumbos. Compensate them. They deserve it.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Madam Speaker, there is a common, well known principle in the computer industry, as in many other industries, called garbage in-garbage out. If one starts with mumbo-jumbo, one might get mumbo-jumbo. If one does not treat people respectfully, one might not always get the answer one wants.

To cast aspersions on the member for Richmond Hill after the member had wilfully changed the topic of the question and to talk about a member as other than a professional member of the House is not acceptable.

As far as compensation is concerned, the minister has been very clear. The process is underway. The wish is to include these people. The actuarial surplus will be reported. The amount for this year was foreseen by experts from the private sector. They were selected and approved by people with hepatitis C and other diseases and by the courts in the three provinces, Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia. I cannot think of a better, more professional way to proceed.

SABLE ISLAND

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question tonight is further to the question I asked regarding Sable Island.

The government has been quite schizophrenic in its handling of Sable Island. The costs of maintaining a human presence on Sable Island are not large but the benefits are huge.

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There has been human habitation on Sable Island since 1802, who were originally from the colony of Nova Scotia. Since Confederation the federal government has retained that mandate. However in the 1990s it offloaded it, which is part of the reason that I call this a schizophrenic arrangement.

The government offloaded its responsibility and succeeded offloading it on to a preservation trust. This arrangement was failing because of the funding partners and so it offloaded part of the funding on to industry and so on. This whole arrangement was falling apart and as of March 31 nobody was going to be left on the island.

The official opposition started to ask questions and generate media attention. We got the government's attention to do something to correct the situation, rather than continuing the dithering it had been doing for a great many years.

Sable Island cannot be treated like a rental car. It is a core asset and one that needs authorization to establish a presence there in order to maintain our sovereignty and derive the benefits that will come with it.

I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago to attend a presentation by Zoe Larsen from the Ecology Action Network at the Museum of Nature in Ottawa. She has spent 30 years researching Sable Island. The institutional memory and the stewardship that was displayed in her presentation was amazing.

We need a long term, sustainable commitment to this place. It extends Canada's economic zone outward for hundreds of kilometres. It also extends our reach for search and rescue operations, for the military, et cetera. Sable Island is vitally important.

There is a long identified problem of multiple federal departments benefiting from the station, yet the costs being borne disproportionately by DFO, which is why we had the offloading situation. The Ministers of the Environment and Fisheries and Oceans finally made an announcement on January 31 saying that the government was committed to maintaining a human presence but that it was still leaving us with a shortfall in funding, which it was going to put in place for the next year or two while it revisited some other options.

My questions are simple. As there is no authorization by statute to guarantee a human presence on the island, when can we expect that? Two departments are covering the funding in the short term but a long term arrangement is needed. When can we expect that? All the government's arrangements to date have been quite myopic. I would like an expansion on the original answer to this question.

• (1920)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, I appreciate the opportunity to rise in this House to say a few words on the important debate about the status of Sable Island.

Like the member opposite, I fully appreciate the importance of this extremely unique island. Sable Island is home to a number of migratory birds, seals, and of course, the most famous of the island's fauna, the wild horses. Many birds, including some species at risk

birds, use the island as a breeding ground and several other animals that call the island home are protected under the Species at Risk Act.

One other item that this island is home to and which is of interest to all Canadians is Captain Cook's long-lost treasure.

The island is important for other reasons too. Environment Canada has a weather station on the island and monitors pollution. Fisheries scientists regularly conduct research into the island's grey seal population. For the Province of Nova Scotia, the island is of key historical and environmental interest, and Canada's oil and gas industry has taken a very keen interest in the fuel reserves off the island's coast.

Clearly, managing all this activity while ensuring the protection of the island's fragile environment and the many species that call this island home is a very complex task. That is why in recent years the Government of Canada has taken a partnership approach in managing this island. Since 2000, the Sable Island Preservation Trust has managed the island under a joint agreement with Environment Canada and DFO. With support from the private sector and the provincial government, they have come together to chart a course for the future.

The Government of Canada announced the creation of a senior level committee to establish an approach for the management of Sable Island going into the future. The committee met in November to discuss the options available to it. Its recommendations have been made to both the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

While no decision has been made yet with respect to a long term solution for the administration of Sable Island, the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has stated on many occasions his commitment to the protection of this unique environment and the many species that call the island home. He is also committed to ensuring that the concerns of all stakeholders are considered as we move forward on this issue.

It is for this reason that the minister recently joined the Minister of the Environment to announce the Government of Canada's plans to continue—and I repeat it here for the benefit of the hon. member—a year-round human presence on Sable Island and to directly manage the island's weather station. This will allow the Sable Island Preservation Trust to focus its energies on the vital tasks of public education, research and conservation until the question of a long term approach is settled once and for all.

• (1925)

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, I did not learn anything from that response that I was not aware of.

Here is what the question really is. We know that the advisory committee recommended to the ministers that this indeed should be taken over by the federal government and that there should be a continued human presence on the island. I am trying to get there; I am trying to get the government there. I am trying to get the government to recognize that we need more than an announcement and a press release.

What we need is some legislation that would change the government mandate and mission and put it into some kind of permanent form for Sable Island. We also must have more than the next couple of years' worth of funding guaranteed in order to meet that mission. That is what I have not heard and that is what I am asking for.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Madam Speaker, if the hon. member did not learn anything, there is probably nothing I can do about that, but I just want to repeat a few things that I did mention.

A senior level committee, comprised of assistant deputy ministers from a number of federal government departments, met in November to review options. This committee has made recommendations to the ministers involved.

The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has assured the stakeholders that a decision will be made shortly. He has indicated that the department, and Environment Canada, I should add, will be supporting the operation of the weather station for the near future while continuing to work toward a long term solution. I do not believe the hon. member appreciates what the Government of Canada has done over the past number of years and the commitment that it has said it will follow going forward.

Also, if I may continue, the minister has indicated on many occasions his commitment to working with all interests to maintain an effective human presence on this island to ensure protection of the many species that call this island home. The question of how this presence is managed and how this presence is funded is at the heart of the recommendations now being considered.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Madam Speaker, to put into context my question for both the viewing audience and for the record, the adjournment proceedings tonight that I am participating in were sparked by a question I put to the government last year.

I said to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food that about all we had from the government on the live cattle ban was excuses on why the U.S. border would not open. I said that President Bush had come and gone and still the border remained closed. I then asked when the border would be opened.

I asked the question for a couple of reasons. I wanted to understand what the government's strategy or plan was on its foreign policy and agricultural policy, and particularly how the two were related. The debate on the BSE has gone on continuously. It has been roughly two years since the border closed. It seemed to me that the government had no plan and I wanted to try to understand, to grasp where it was coming from.

This is very important because the agriculture community of Canada is one of the vital, underlying, underpinning elements of our economy and, in particular, the cattle and beef industry ranges all across the country. It is important to almost every province, from British Columbia in the west, to the prairies and in my home province of Saskatchewan, to Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and even to the Atlantic provinces.

Adjournment Proceedings

I put the question to the government to understand what proactive plan it had for the future, thinking ahead. This is interesting and important because we had seen the mad cow crisis as it had struck Europe and the lack of forethought the Europeans had. It was much greater than what we had. Brazil and various other countries had it but the government had no overlying foreign or agriculture policy proactively thought out ahead to see what and when we could do it as soon as it came.

We can see that the government had no effective plan because we see the results of it, literally two years to get the borders open on one case. It has now come to two or three different cases on the BSE, something so minor, so trivial that our borders should not have been shut down but it is something that we should have thought about.

I was curious and wanted to understand what the government was thinking on the agriculture policy but it also demonstrates our overall lack of a foreign policy. Agriculture, as with all trade departments, is involved in that too.

I was trying to grasp and understand what the Prime Minister and agriculture minister discussed with President Bush and to find out how we could use Canada's influence in the world. Unfortunately, we found out very clearly that Canada, with this government, has no influence in the world. Canada has no influence on agriculture policy in the United States unless we learn some of these lessons. The government apparently has not learned.

I will repeat my question to the government in more broad terms because the border is opening up. What is the proactive plan of the government on foreign policy, particularly as it relates to agriculture? What steps is it going to take to actually protect farmers from future disasters? We do not want just words. We want real actions.

● (1930)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food (Rural Development), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I certainly am pleased to respond on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The member's question was when the border would open, but regarding the member's remarks in terms of strategy and plans, the member knows full well that we have had a strategy and a plan in place for a long time. We have worked aggressively in terms of getting the U.S. border open. In fact we are the only country, the first country which had BSE that moved back into a market. That is a first in the world. It shows the forward planning of the Government of Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in terms of our traceability, our identification system, and our good system of record keeping so that when we get into the science and making science based decisions, we have the evidence and we can move ahead.

In terms of strategy, the member knew when he previously asked the question that the minister made an announcement on September 10 which looked at six basic points. One of the key ones was that we needed to work with the industry to increase our slaughter capacity within this country. We are seeing some movement in that direction now.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of the U.S. market to Canadian producers. In fact the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food along with a number of his provincial counterparts and the industry went down to the U.S. capital last week. They made representations again not only on behalf of the cattle and beef sectors but also on behalf of all exporters of animal and meat affected by the border closure, including sheep, goat, bison, elk and the other ruminant industries. It is important to mention that.

I want to emphasize that Canada became the first country affected by BSE to regain access to the United States market. As a result of forward planning and forward looking by the Government of Canada, that partial reopening of the border meant that Canada exported over 300,000 tonnes of beef to the United States in 2004.

As the member knows full well, the Prime Minister got a commitment from President Bush on several occasions to reopen the border as soon as possible. That is extremely important with the process we are involved in now. That commitment bore fruit when the United States department of agriculture published the U.S. BSE minimal risk rule in the *Federal Register* on January 4. The hon. member must be aware that this rule is scheduled to take effect on March 7 this year.

When implemented the final rule will provide access to the United States for a range of live animals in beef and ruminant products. In particular the rule will once again allow for the importation into the United States of live cattle under 30 months of age for slaughter. That represents significant progress.

The Government of Canada will continue to work closely with the United States to see that the border is opened fully.

• (1935)

Mr. Bradley Trost: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's remarks, but somehow I find this a little hard to believe.

I realize there are exceptions and the border will not be fully opened by March, but its being closed for basically two years is somehow considered to be a success by the government. The packing industry in the United States was lobbying on our side. The mainstream beef-producing organizations were lobbying on our side.

We had powerful allies down there who in many ways did considerably more than the Liberal government did to lobby on behalf of Canadian cattle. It is a disgrace that the government was not as effective as they were.

I cannot understand how the government considers a two year border closure as some sort of major success. If we had had a proper relationship and open channels instead of members on that side antagonizing the American political establishment, we would have had this issue solved much earlier.

Again I ask the minister how he considers this long period of border closure to be a success.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I can only shake my head. The member knows full well that when it comes to BSE, when we look at some of the other countries around the world that had BSE, they never moved into markets nearly as fast as Canada has moved into markets. It is as a result of the hard work of the minister, the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, backbenchers on this side of the House and indeed some members on the other side of the House who worked strenuously to get that border open.

This is what I cannot understand about members on that side. Instead of talking about what the reality is in terms of what we are doing and trying to keep the focus on getting the border open, they continue to get into this rhetoric of trying to make the situation look worse than it is. The fact is we do have a timeline in place now for the reopening of the border. That underscores the reasons we have undertaken the kind of cooperative approach that we have as the Government of Canada, including the Prime Minister's relationship with President Bush.

We are making progress. On this side of the House we are proud of that process and we will continue to keep the pressure on.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a. m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:38 p.m.)

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